The Historical Bejeezus

What a Long, Strange Quest It's Been

Robert M. Price

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By Robert M. Price

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Dedicated to Rich Griese
Indefatigable Genius

Introduction:

The Quest for the Historical Bejeezus

I have been intensely interested in the historical Jesus problem for many years. At first my goal was to reassure myself that the gospel portraits of Jesus were genuine history. The farther I proceeded down this path, the less I judged the gospels to be faithful representations of a historical figure, finally gravitating toward the radical theory that there was no historical basis to the Jesus figure at all. In my studies I sought acquaintance with the works of major scholars in the field, and there were many of these, not that I'm complaining. Indeed I have found the works of scholars of all stripes and shades of opinion enlightening and fascinating. There is always something to learn even from works with which one feels forced to disagree. Even works whose extravagant speculations scare the Bejeezus out of you.

For the earlier phases of Jesus research I was dependent upon Albert Schweitzer's *magnum opus* known in English translation as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. In it he summarized and analyzed in real depth just about all previous life of Jesus books. Of course, where I could obtain the books he discussed, at least in translation, I hastened to devour them, too. What a feast! And then I rounded up the books written since Schweitzer, and there were very many of them, too. And that brings me to both the subject and the approach of the present volume, a collection of my essays and (mainly) reviews of historical Jesus scholarship. My flagship essay, "The Quest of the Quest of the Historical Jesus," is a paper given to the Jesus Seminar. Subsequently it formed the basis of my book *Deconstructing Jesus*. It traces and comments upon major trends in the ongoing safari to bag Jesus, seeking to draw out certain important implications of some of today's "hottest" New Testament critics, who in my opinion do not follow their own insights to their natural and more radical conclusions.

The rest of the contents of this quest for the historical Bejeezus takes the form of book reviews. I am the book review editor for the Life of Jesus section of the *Religious Studies Review*, but most of these review essays appeared in *The Journal of Higher Criticism*, where I had the liberty to take a more expansive approach, interacting in more detail both with the authors of the books under review and with the issues themselves. These reviews are, I think, essays in their own right, offering my own perspectives on the work of fellow scholars and on the issues over which we may differ. And there are frequent and serious differences! I take quite seriously even works considered eccentric by the (often dull) mainstream of conventional scholarship. It is only by taking such books seriously, rather than offering facile mockery and disdain, that one can tell the difference between nonsense and brilliant new theories. But I have no wish to defend nonsense, and my book's title pretty well indicates that I find a good bit of it in several of the books I review. And, again, it is my job to show why they are nonsense if indeed they are.

By compiling reviews, I am seeking to emulate the great Schweitzer who, as I say, spent chapter after chapter of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* in what amounts to detailed book reviews. I like that approach. One reason I prefer it is that it has always helped me to compare notes with scholars about major scholarly works of which I seek to do my own evaluation. For instance, if I can compare my reading of Bultmann with Tillich's understanding of him, I stand to understand the work of both men better. Likewise, I hope that you will read some of the books I treat here, not taking my word as gospel but rather so you can compare notes with me as a fellow scholar. And that is always my goal: not to create disciples of my own, but to facilitate my readers' forming their own syntheses. If I can provide new information and perspectives, I have done my job. The rest is up to them (you).

But I will not shy away from telling you that, if you are interested in my theories on the Jesus question (perhaps having read my books *Deconstructing Jesus*, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, *etc.*), you may find more here. It is an ancient practice to employ as vehicles for the expression of one's own insights older texts on which one comments. We read Plato's Socratic dialogues more to learn what Plato taught than what Socrates himself said. We are probably not so much interested in the *Vedanta Sutras* of Bhadarayana as we are in Shankara's own theosophy

when we read the latter's commentary on the former. Your thinking will be informed and expanded when you read various scholarly works, and mine has been as well. In these pages you will see me thinking aloud (or in print, I guess), and I invite you to join me.

Robert M. Price,
May 25, 2012

[begin p. 13]

Chapter One:

The Quest for the Quest of the Historical Jesus

I believe that Ernest Renan,[1] ex-Catholic seminarian and author of one of the first attempts at a 'historical Jesus' biography, was quite correct when he warned that, to be able to write the history of a religion, one must meet two requirements. First, one must have believed in the religion. Second, one must believe in it no longer. Without the first, one can never gain the proper feel for what motivated the religion's believers, what they cherished. Without the second, one can never attain the necessary perspective to see through the haze of pious propaganda each religion generates for itself. Religious people tend to be interested in facts only insofar as they edify, and this usually means the facts will not remain factual for long. Albert Schweitzer[2] (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, 1906) demonstrated in merciless detail how the already long parade of Jesus books suffered from their authors lacking in one or the other of Renan's two prescriptions, either the sympathy or the critical distance.

He showed how theologians who were intellectually liberal enough to be able to throw off the blinders of traditional dogma were yet so captivated by their own modernistic form of faith that they could not imagine a historical Jesus who did not look pretty much like them, parroting enlightened nineteenth-century ethical monotheism, *etc.* Their Jesus was, like them, uninterested in theological dogma. Rather he promoted "the higher righteousness" and "the infinite value of the individual soul" (as Adolf von Harnack,[3]
[begin p. 14]
perhaps the quintessential liberal Jesus historian, put it in *What Is Christianity?* 1899). An implacable and acerbic foe of Pharisaic (and, implicitly, Catholic or Protestant) legalism, this Jesus pioneered the Social Gospel and exemplified the soul entirely open to God. As Schweitzer pointed out, once Jesus had been reimagined in this way, historical

criticism was invariably replaced by novelizing, psychologizing, and rationalizing. That is, the supernatural was explained away, Jesus' inner feelings and struggles were imagined, and the blanks were filled in accordingly.

Like their conservative cousins, the liberal questers were in the final analysis playing a game of tug-o'-war using Jesus as the rope. It was as in Luke 12:13–14, with one brother appealing to Jesus against the other, "Master, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But now as then, Jesus will have none of it: "O man, who made me a judge or arbiter over you?" The historical Jesus, Schweitzer showed, turns out to be as alien to our day as he was to his own. He is an embarrassment equally to dogmatic Trinitarian and to liberal religionist, a creature of his own age stamped indelibly with the assumptions of that age.

The most important bit of mental furniture marking Jesus as a child of his age, not an anachronistic mutant anticipating ours, was apocalypticism. From the recent studies of Johannes Weiss[4] (*Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, 1892, 1900) Schweitzer had become convinced that Jesus announced the imminent coming of the Final Judgment, the Battle of Armageddon, the Great Tribulation. Something like a benign Charles Manson, Schweitzer's Jesus expected to survive the general chaos and emerge victorious to reign over the New Age as Messiah and Son of Man. He exhorted his contemporaries to repent and show God that they were at long last worthy of the advent of the long-awaited Messianic Age. When the end lingered, Jesus went back to the drawing board and decided

[begin p. 15]

God must have assigned him to take the general Tribulation of the End Time onto his own shoulders. He must suffer and die for his contemporaries. Then he would rise transfigured as the Son of Man. As a quick glance at the calendar will reveal, Jesus was tragically, yet grandly, mistaken. Nonetheless, as Schweitzer affirmed, Jesus still commands us down the centuries because from him flows a mighty current of spiritual force that summons us to follow him and join him in his task.

What task? Trying to cajole God into hastening his eschatological kingdom? No, living out the redemptive ethics of Jesus' "higher righteousness." Schweitzer never faulted the liberals on their sketch of

Jesus' ethics. He thought they were basically right about that;[5] the problem was that they tended to isolate the moral preachments from their theological context in Jesus' message, thus whittling them down to something more or less acceptable to us today. And while such surgery may be quite advisable in delineating Christian discipleship today, it cannot be accepted as a description of how Jesus himself viewed the matter. We need not (indeed cannot) embrace Jesus' erroneous apocalypticism in order to be Christians, but let us not make Jesus into a mere ventriloquist dummy mouthing our opinions.

Schweitzer's view was apocalyptic in a second sense. Like that other radical Protestant G.W.F. Hegel, Schweitzer implicitly thought the history of his discipline had reached its end with him. Unless one were to accept his (and Weiss's) estimate of Jesus as a figure of "thoroughgoing eschatology" the only remaining alternative would be the "thoroughgoing skepticism" promoted by another contemporary book, William Wrede's *The Messianic Secret* (1901).[6] Wrede argued

[begin p. 16]

that the figure of Jesus has been forever obscured already by the theological artistry of Mark's gospel. We can never know what Jesus was really like. We might also compare Schweitzer's challenge to that of Kant with his moral argument for the existence of God: our inner moral instinct might be a sham, but are we really prepared to live with the implications? Even so Schweitzer: Wrede might be right about an unknowable Jesus, but if you find that unpalatable, then Schweitzer's is the alternative.

Schweitzer's and Weiss's apocalyptic Jesus did make an impact. But *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* certainly did not close down the scholarly cottage industry of writing lives of Jesus, despite what one usually reads. Various theologians made peace with Schweitzer's conclusions as best they might. The most prominent of them was Rudolf Bultmann, who demythologized Jesus' end-of-the-world preaching into existentialism. In Heideggerian terms, said Bultmann,[7] Jesus can be seen as summoning us to abandon the 'inauthentic' self-sufficiency of our lives and to set aside all claims to self-justification (self-authentication) in favor of openness to God's future. But even Bultmann resisted writing a biography of the historical Jesus. What mattered to him in the last analysis was not the historical Jesus but the Christ of the Church's faith. So the

historical Jesus had been wrong, but it hardly mattered, any more than what his favorite food might have been.

Meet the new boss, same as the old boss[8]

But lives of Jesus went on unabated. The difference was, they were now written by conservative traditionalists of the 'Neo-Orthodox' type who by no means rejected historical criticism but tried instead to use it in a 'safe' manner. They had appreciated the liberal lives of
[begin p. 17]

Jesus as little as Schweitzer himself did, but for the opposite reason. They preferred a more traditional Jesus, one more in accord with traditional dogma. And ironically, in Schweitzer they found what they were looking for. Scholars like A.M. Hunter,[9] Vincent Taylor,[10] Oscar Cullmann, [11] T.W. Manson,[12] William Manson,[13] and others, affiliated with the Anglican, Reformed, and Lutheran churches, had had little patience with the likes of Harnack. They wanted a Jesus who was no mere ethicist but had a full-blooded theology. By showing that theology was important to Jesus after all, Schweitzer seemed to these scholar-theologians to have opened up a space for them to smuggle back in their traditionalist dogmas. Some swallowed hard and admitted that Jesus had been in error, but then they hastened to chalk this lapse up to the limitations of the Incarnation (hence the post-Schweitzer popularity of the Kenosis Christology[14] based on Philippians 2: 5–11: Christ temporarily set aside divine prerogatives such as omniscience when he became flesh).

Others demythologized Jesus' apocalyptic message (or even imagined that Jesus himself had already obligingly demythologized it for them). Catholic Modernist Alfred Loisy[15] said that Jesus preached the coming of the Kingdom of God, but what actually wound up coming was the Church. Cullmann, Taylor, *et al*., said that what Jesus
[begin p. 18]

meant by the coming Kingdom *was* the Church! Cullmann's classic harmonization[16] was that D Day, the decisive turning of the corner, had arrived within Jesus' own generation, though the final mopping up till VE Day might well take a couple of thousand years. The Last Days were intended as qualitative, not quantitative.

Adjusting Schweitzer's theory of Jesus having offered himself to bear the brunt of the Tribulation on behalf of his elect, Cullmann and the rest invoked Rudolf Otto's theory[17] that Jesus had combined 2 Isaiah's Suffering Servant role with that of the apocalyptic Son of Man from Daniel and 1 Enoch. This let them again redefine away Jesus' apocalyptic message. As in traditional Christian dogma, Jesus was transformed from the Jewish Messiah into the Christian Redeemer. Schweitzer had poked a hole in the dike by challenging the liberal notion that Jesus cared nothing for dogma. Taylor and the others worked at that hole till all the old Christian dogma could come pouring back through it, attributed, as it always had been, to Jesus. That taken care of, the books by Hunter, Manson and the rest tended to make just as much use of the old techniques of gap-filling by novelistic psychologizing and historicizing as the old liberal lives of Jesus did. The psychologizing (for instance, doting on the heroic dedication of Jesus in shouldering the role of the Suffering Servant) [18] served the same function it always had, holding up an example of piety for the reader to emulate. In retrospective, it is astonishing the degree to which, in the name of historical criticism, traditionalist apologetics and homiletics crept back in.

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But even Bultmann's disciples (Günther Bornkamm,[19] James M. Robinson,[20] Ernst Käsemann,[21] Ernst Fuchs,[22] Hans Conzelmann, [23] and other like-minded scholars)[24] were not able to resist temptation. Though for them Bultmann's existentialist gospel was *de rigueur*, they began to feel insecure in their preaching of the Heideggerian kerygma if they could not demonstrate that their understanding of the message about Jesus was at least naturally continuous with the faith of Jesus himself. Could it be shown that he himself had had the same sort of radical openness to God's future as Bultmannian Christians now preached in his name? They feared that being as willing as Bultmann had been to consign the historical Jesus to agnostic irrelevance laid them open to charges of Docetism, the belief that Jesus Christ had not really come in the flesh [1 John 4:1], or that if he had, it hardly mattered. So they inaugurated a "New Quest for the Historical Jesus." They knew no full-scale biography was possible, but could one isolate a core of authentic sayings that would provide an insight into the existential self-understanding of Jesus? The

post-Bultmannians thought so. Van A. Harvey[25] (*The*
[begin p. 20]
Historian and the Believer, 1966) called their bluff. It seemed a lot of wishful thinking, methodologically unsound. Again, theologians seemed to be fashioning a historical Jesus in their own image.

What is your quest? What's your favorite colour?

It is often said that Schweitzer brought the original quest of the historical Jesus to an end, but as we have seen, that is not so. The same sort of homiletical fluff, albeit with a neo-conservative flavor, continued to be produced; meanwhile, the post-Bultmannian New Quest did represent something of a return to the game by the liberal team, but it soon collapsed. Recently a whole new wave of historical Jesus studies has appeared, and in them one can discern the same two strands. A so-called Third Quest of the historical Jesus has been mounted by a drill team of conservative scholars (forget the *neo*-) who are engaged in out-and-out apologetics on behalf of the traditional dogma. These writers include Richard B. Hays,[26] Luke Timothy Johnson,[27] N.T. Wright,[28] and Ben Witherington III.[29] Taking advantage of the financial and demographic upsurge of conservative evangelical seminaries (and the conservative retrenchment of many mainstream denominations), these apologists realize they are fast becoming the mainstream, that genuine historical criticism has fallen from favor, and that old arguments will gain a favorable hearing they never would have in the days of genuine critical study.[30]

[begin p. 21]

At the same time, a group of more critical, more liberal, scholars has renewed the New Quest. That is, they are taking the old liberal approach of narrowing down a reliable database of Jesus' sayings and divining from them what beliefs and attitudes the historical Jesus held. These scholars would include Robert W. Funk,[31] John Dominic Crossan, [32] Burton L. Mack,[33] Richard A. Horsley[34] and others, all associated at one time or another with the notorious Jesus Seminar.[35] While the Third Questers insist on seeing Jesus as an apocalyptic figure,

they are often careful to interpret away the note of imminence attached to the end-time prediction in the apocalyptic sayings of Jesus. For the conservative Third Questers, Schweitzer's "apocalyptic Jesus" has shrunk merely to a Jesus who taught that someday there would be a second coming. By contrast, the 'Renewed Questers' (as Funk liked to call them), represent a return to liberal Protestant pre-Schweitzer Jesus research. These scholars question whether the apocalyptic element was a later accretion (as Julius Wellhausen had already contended),[36] added to sayings of Jesus as the war of the Jews with Rome drew closer. Christians had said these things and attributed them to Jesus. In his own generation Jesus would have been something of a wisdom teacher and possibly even a nonviolent social reformer and founder of Oneida-like
[begin p. 22]
communities. This Jesus is a proto-feminist,[37] a kind of first-century E.F. Schumacher or Mohandas Gandhi, and a flouter of Jewish norms, with a great resemblance to the ancient Cynic philosophers.

It is hard to resist the conclusion that the lessons Schweitzer taught have been largely ignored, and that Jesus is again becoming the anachronistic mouthpiece for the cherished views of modern scholars. The resultant Jesus is quite convenient for liberal Protestant activists, and many among the Unitarian Universalist movement find this Jesus attractive as well, an irreverent, largely secular, and socially involved Jesus who can serve quite well as a pitchman for their causes.

But there is a more radical approach to the historical Jesus question that is also more consistent with recent generations of religious humanist thinking. This approach is that which seriously considers the possibilities that, first, Jesus never existed as a historical figure (at least not as a single historical individual, though his story may combine elements of real historical figures); second, that Jesus has retreated so far beyond historical recovery that we must remain agnostic concerning him; and that, third, far from preaching and enacting a theology of his own atoning death, Jesus may not have died on the cross at all. The irony is that, though scoffed at nowadays by conservative and liberal alike, both Catholic and Protestant, these possibilities are implied in the very theories espoused by the liberal Renewed Questers, especially Crossan and Mack, whose work I will briefly survey here. I would suggest that religious humanists are perhaps

in a better position than anyone else to recognize the astonishing implications of the most popular current theories of the historical Jesus.

The Cross(an) Gospel

In a series of exhaustively researched and engagingly written books,[38] John Dominic Crossan has certainly won the distinction
[begin p. 23]
of being the most prolific of the Renewed Questers. I want to deal briefly with just two of his major claims here. One has to do with the historical Jesus and how Crossan proposes to distil him from the evidence. The other has to do with the nature of the gospel evidence as he understands it.

It is quite revealing that Crossan's major book, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, spends fully its first half filling in the background for Jesus. A more accurate title might have been *The Life of Mediterranean Jewish Peasants and the Historical Jesus*. The table of contents would seem to suggest that each chapter will study some aspect of the life of Jesus: 'Visionary and Teacher,' 'Peasant and Protestor,' 'Magician and Prophet,' 'Bandit and Messiah,' 'Rebel and Revolutionary.' But instead each chapter delineates a category, a social or religious role in which Jesus might be seen. Some recent scholars have indeed chosen to place Jesus in one or another of the categories Crossan defines in these chapters. Some scholars try out the paradigm of peasant revolutionary (violent or nonviolent),[39] others that of an itinerant Cynic sage,[40] still others
[begin p. 24]
that of a magician, or a charismatic *hasid*,[41] *etc*. Crossan succeeds in rounding up and synthesizing a great deal of this scholarship. But these chapters, strangely, do not actually deal with Jesus. They sketch out the paradigm in each case, providing a great deal of data drawn from ancient historians, modern students of Mediterranean peasant sociology, *etc*., despite the fact that the chapter titles clearly imply that each chapter is viewing Jesus himself from a new angle. Whence the discrepancy? Or, better, how is it that Crossan does not see it as a discrepancy? The answer, I think, is that he has made the supposed historical Jesus into a mere function of the categories which have been employed to analyze him.

For many scholars, the diversity of the proposed paradigms for Jesus (revolutionist, reformer, feminist, community activist, magician, Cynic, *hasid*) provides a menu of alternative ways of looking at the evidence. One tries each on for size and ponders the extent to which each makes more natural sense of the gospel data (sayings, stories, *etc.*). Indeed, it is not too much to say that contemporary historical Jesus scholarship is faced with an embarrassment of riches, for several of the resultant Jesus sketches seem to make quite a bit of sense. The problem is that it is not quite clear how several of them, much less all, could be true of one man at the same time. Would a priestly messiah have made Cynic quips about how kosher laws are moot since clean and unclean foods both come out in the same toilet? Would a community organizer have been known as an exorcist?

What is Crossan's solution? He doesn't think he needs to choose. His Jesus is ostensibly a combination of all of them. Since he cannot finally harmonize all the differences, Crossan seems to cheat, reinterpreting one category in light of one of the others which he really seems to prefer after all. For instance, though we wade through a good bit of data on ancient magic which somehow seems to make Jesus *ipso facto* into a magician, we eventually discover

[begin p. 25]

that Crossan's heart is really with the model of Jesus as a radical community organizer. So what of the magic? Morton Smith and others originally hypothesized a *Jesus the Magician* (1978) to give sufficient weight to all the gospel healing and exorcism tales.[42] But Crossan does not think Jesus ever actually healed anyone. No, what he really did was to welcome people whose diseases rendered them officially 'unclean.' Jesus' big magic trick was to invite the sick and the stinking to share meals with him. "Meal and Miracle," *commensality* Crossan dubs it. But Crossan has resorted to the same sort of allegorical rationalizing as the old Rationalists who had Jesus walk on the stepping stones in the Sea of Galilee. His theory here precisely matches that of the much-criticized Barbara Thiering[43] who says that Jesus' 'resurrection' of Lazarus really denoted Jesus lifting the ban of excommunication levied on Lazarus by the Qumran bishops. Somehow Crossan can get away with saying it where Thiering can't.

Fascinated by the work of Bruce J. Malina,[44] and others on the possible application of Mediterranean peasant sociology to the gospels, Crossan gives much air play to the notion of patron-client relationships ('brokerage') in ancient society. And if a notion looms large in contemporary academic discussion, it must have loomed large on Jesus' agenda, too. So Crossan characterizes Jesus' preaching as that of an 'unbrokered kingdom.' That is, Jesus proclaimed free access to God without the need of the Temple sacrifice system and the taxation it entailed. (Ironically, and I am hardly the first to point it out, this means Crossan has made Jesus into the broker of this unbrokered kingdom.)

Crossan's Jesus is the word made incarnate, the word of current academic discussion. Jesus is theory in the flesh, a reification of the
[begin p. 26]
theories about him. One might apply to the first half of Crossan's *The Historical Jesus* the title of one of Paulist Press's mini-surveys of current scholarly opinion: *What Are They Saying About Jesus?* Jesus becomes a function of what they are saying about him.

Why does it not occur to Crossan that we might have to, first, choose one of the many historical Jesus alternatives; second, throw up our hands and confess agnosticism on the whole question; or third, speculate that the gospels have combined traditions of different Jesus figures active during the same general period? I think it is because Crossan, though no longer a Dominican monk, is still a Roman Catholic and for him there must be "one Lord" [Ephesians 4:5]—at least one, no more than one.

Johnny's playroom
is a bunker filled with sand;
he's become a Third World man[45]

Perhaps Crossan's most valuable and painstaking work is contained in his excellent volume *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus*.[46] Though this book, too, is too heavily front-loaded with prolegomena, Crossan does finally get down to work separating the wheat from the chaff among the sayings attributed to Jesus, weeding out spurious accretions (whether whole sayings or secondary versions of authentic ones). It is all the more surprising therefore to see to what an extent his exegetical basis

for his Jesus' message of "unbrokered commensality," feminism, and Oneida-building in *The Historical Jesus* turns out to be a house built on sand. Like Richard A. Horsley, Crossan weaves a tissue of sayings and parables Bultmann wouldn't have touched with a ten-foot pole.

That Jesus was against the patriarchal family is derived from Luke 12:51–53, where we read that Jesus will have set family
[begin p. 27]
members against one another, and Mark 3:34–35, where he neglects to enumerate fathers among the family. (Others add Matthew 23: 9, where he exhorts readers to "call no man on earth 'father'.") The first presupposes a post-Jesus marginalization of an organized Jesus-religion which is so controversial that it splits families, since some members will see it as their duty not to abandon their ancestral faith of Judaism for the new god Jesus. The second surely represents post-Jesus bickering over the status of Jesus' brothers James the Just, Judas Thomas, and Simeon bar-Cleophas. The third is another bit of Matthean hairsplitting presupposing a still-hot dispute with Rabbinic Judaism, from some 70 years after Jesus at least. Matthew doesn't mean you should repudiate your dad; he just doesn't want you addressing rival Jewish scribes by the honorific title *Abba*, as was common.

That Jesus was in favor of across-the-board debt amnesty supposedly follows from the Lord's Prayer. Does Jesus mean you can get God to cancel your monetary debts to the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker in the Forgive-us-our-debts petition? Not even fundamentalists show themselves so incapable of recognizing a metaphor (and a well-known one at that). Indeed, even if any or all of these sayings should possibly go back to the historical Jesus, we should still have to judge these interpretations as examples of Rorschach blot exegesis.

So much for the Politically Correct Jesus. He has been cobbled together from inauthentic and over-interpreted sayings. What is extraordinarily ironic is that Crossan has in this case done exactly what he shows the early Christian midrashists did in the case of the 80% fictitious Passion Narrative, as we will presently see.

The Cruci-fiction

Crossan's treatment of the Passion Narrative may be summarized in its main distinctives as follows. He draws attention to the research of George W.E. Nickelsburg,[47] indicating that the story of
[begin p. 28]
Jesus' sufferings, death, and resurrection embodies a common type of edifying tale relating the vindication of the Suffering Righteous One. Other well-known instances include Daniel, Joseph, Ahiqar, and Tobit, all of whom are falsely accused, then condemned, but finally come out on top. Crossan subdivides the stories of this type according to whether the hero is rescued from the plotters in the nick of time and restored to his former privilege and position, or whether he is martyred but later vindicated by God, *e.g.*, in a heavenly vision. Crossan reasons that the second subtype represents an adjustment of the traditional nice-guys-finish-first tale to the bloody realities of Maccabean-era persecutions. And he figures that the story of Jesus is something of a combination of themes from both versions. (I will return to this last observation below, to show where I think Crossan has neglected some important evidence that the gospel story was originally a simple instance of what he calls the "innocence rescued" subtype, not a mixture of the two.)

Once early Christians got the idea to start telling stories of the crucifixion, as opposed to simply proclaiming the bare fact of the cross [1 Cor. 1:23], Crossan thinks they quite naturally adopted the Suffering Righteous One plot germ and began to fill in the details. From whence? Crossan shows in great detail how virtually every detail of the Passion Narrative has been derived from Old Testament passages taken out of context by early Christian scribes, on the assumption that the texts in question were secret predictions of the life and death of Jesus. To make the point one need but compare Psalm 22 with Mark 15, the crucifixion account. Nowhere does Psalm 22 represent itself as a prophecy of anything; on the contrary, it is a typical 'individual lament' or 'individual complaint' psalm,[48] a prayer for help in a time of desperate need. Nor does Mark 15 anywhere tip off the reader that the events it recounts are supposed to have occurred as fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy. Instead, Mark 15 silently takes over the skeleton and many of the details of Psalm 22 and historicizes them. And when Matthew feels inclined to
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add details to Mark's version, where does he get his 'information'? Why, from the Wisdom of Solomon and from Zechariah! Crossan estimates that some 80% of the Passion Narrative is such prophecy historicized after the fact.

I have just remarked on Matthew's use of Mark's earlier version when he wrote his own account of the crucifixion. Most scholars would put it this way, but Crossan has a unique suggestion to make at this point, too. In *The Cross That Spoke* he argues for a prototypical 'Cross Gospel' employed independently by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and preserved in its fullest form in the noncanonical Gospel of Peter. The Cross Gospel would have been the most elaborate collection of historicized Passion 'prophecies.' This ingenious suggestion has not gone without criticism from Crossan's colleagues. It remains quite plausible, if difficult to prove. As Crossan himself has pointed out, his fiercest critics (like Raymond E. Brown) often presuppose a reconstruction of Passion sources much like his even while rejecting his distinctive version.

But Old Testament texts woven together do not constitute the only possible source for elements of the Passion story. Crossan thinks a striking report of Philo in *Against Flaccus* (36–39) may preserve the origin of a puzzling detail in the Passion Narrative. In detailing the outrages of the Roman Governor Flaccus, Philo (writing *ca*. the 40s CE) tells how Flaccus did nothing to prevent an insult to the Jewish king Herod Agrippa I as he was returning from Rome (where Caligula had crowned him King of the Jews) by way of Alexandria. To show their contempt for any supposed Jewish king, local rowdies rounded up a helpless street person, a halfwit named Carabas, and dressed him up as a mock king, with a door mat for a cape, a papyrus dunce cap for a crown, and a reed for a sceptre. When the retinue of Herod Agrippa came into view, the rascals went into action, genuflecting before the old stumblebum Carabas and hailing him as *Mar*! (as in the early Christian prayer *Maranatha*), 'Lord!' It is impossible not to wonder whether there may be some sort of connection between these events and the Passion of Jesus, where he is paraded like a mock king of the Jews (in the presence of Herod Antipas, according
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to Luke) and substituted for one Barabbas. Crossan admits that the evolving Passion tradition may have absorbed the Carabas story along the

way, applying it to Jesus.

In like manner, Crossan repeats the story of the mad prophet Jesus ben-Ananias, told by Josephus [*Jewish War* VI, V, 3], noting its similarity to the gospel events. Jesus son of Ananias, in the last years before Jerusalem's destruction, made a pest of himself by incessantly crying out "Woe to Jerusalem!" The priests hauled him before the Roman procurator, urging his execution. The procurator interrogated him and flogged him, but Jesus ben Ananias remained stolidly silent. Released, he took up his prophetic lament anew, finally silenced by a Roman catapult shot during the siege he had so long predicted. Crossan flirts with the possibility that this, too, has been absorbed by the gospel tradition.

Now I want to suggest that in all this, Crossan is getting perilously close to peeling back every last skin of the gospel onion and showing, as the old time skeptics used to maintain, there is nothing at the core. First, as to the use of the Suffering Righteous One prototype, Crossan (like Nickelsburg) has shown in effect that the gospel Passion has a literary source, not a historical one. It is the notorious tendency of apologists to want to have their cake and eat it, too, by claiming that the events may yet be real history, even though their teller may have adopted a literary model for the telling of the tale. On closer inspection, this attempt at salvage is meaningless. Why risk undermining the credibility of history by polishing it up in terms of recognized literary forms? To argue this way at all is to admit that the gospel version does look like its literary prototype, and then Occam's Razor makes it superfluous to seek redundant more-than-explanations for an event already adequately accounted for.

In fact, to chalk up the Passion narrative to the literary prototype of the Suffering Righteous One is to have gone halfway to the position of those, like Gilbert Murray, Lord Raglan, and others, who dismiss the whole of the Jesus story as legend because of its entire conformity in every detail to the Mythic Hero Archetype. What is left over that might qualify as "secular" fact?

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Similarly, we have to wonder how it is possible that if Jesus had been publicly tried and crucified there should have been no historical memory on which to rely when the time came to tell a connected story of his death. Why on earth would you fill in all the blanks (and even Crossan

already admits it is some 80% blank!) with biblical proof-texts if anyone remembered the events? It begins to look like there may have been no events to remember or to report.

Patchwork Passion

If we follow the path Crossan has marked out to compare the Passion narrative with contemporary events from the lives of analogous figures, we again seem to close in on a mirage. For Carabas and Jesus ben-Ananias are only the beginning. Burton Mack and others have pointed out how the Cleansing of the Temple episode, as it stands in the gospels, makes no historical sense. The gospels seem to presuppose a scene in which Jesus bursts into something like a rummage sale in a church basement, kicking over tables of old *Monopoly* games and stacks of *Reader's Digest* condensed books, a noisy but minor ruckus from which he might have been able to get away unscathed. But in reality the Court of the Gentiles, where it is said to have happened, took up a full 60 acres! Jesus emptied an area of that size of its vendors, tables and livestock? And we are told he refused to let anyone bring the sacrificial vessels (σκευς) through the area to the altar [Mark 11:16]. This is impossible unless Jesus led a force of armed men, and then we must envision a pitched battle between his forces and those of the temple guards, not to mention the extra Roman troops stationed right down the street during Passover in case of disturbances like this one! Mack is right: either this is what happened, or nothing happened. Mack thinks Mark invented the story, while S.G.F. Brandon and Robert Eisler took the bull by the horns and cast Jesus as a Zealot-like revolutionary.

But there is a third option. It looks to me like the whole business has been borrowed from the history of Josephus (or at least incorporates the same events) concerning the messianic pretender Simon bar-Giora [Josephus, *The Jewish War* V, IX, 11].
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The scene is the last weeks before the fall of the city to the Romans. The bandits of John of Giscala have occupied the temple (which has hence become a den of thieves). They are implacable enemies of the priests, who are lapdogs of the hated Romans. So the priests strike a devil's bargain with Simon bar-Giora to enter the temple and expel their rival

revolutionaries. Simon and his troops make a triumphal entry into the city, hailed as deliverers, and proceed to cleanse the temple of the robbers who infest it. But the Roman siege advances, and eventually Simon endeavors to tunnel out to safety. Giving up on the plan, he tunnels up, bursting out of the earth in full regalia before stunned Romans, who then take him to Rome and execute him as King of the Jews. Sound familiar?

Simon bar-Giora was not crucified, but another king was. Plutarch, contemporary with the Gospel of John, tells the life of Cleomenes, the radical king of Sparta who initiated land redistribution and quickly lost his throne. Driven forth, he traveled all over the Mediterranean, fomenting people's revolution. At Alexandria, his enemies closing in, Cleomenes and his followers executed a suicide pact (one of them stabbing another to make sure he was dead, as in John 19:34). When the authorities discovered the bodies, they crucified that of Cleomenes. Mourners noticed that a snake appeared and coiled itself about the head of the slain king so that vultures might not desecrate the corpse. This and other omens persuaded bystanders that the crucified king must have been a son of the gods, and the site of his cross became thereafter a place of vigil and pilgrimage by the women who cherished his memory [Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, "Cleomenes"]. Sound familiar?

Pontius Pilate received word that a great crowd of Samaritans planned to rally on the slopes of Mount Gerizim, the site of the old Samaritan temple, to greet the Taheb, the Samaritan Prophet like Moses who should appear to reveal the location of the lost temple vessels. Pilate sent troops to disperse the unarmed crowd, massacring most of them, whereupon the Samaritan elders complained to Rome, resulting in Pilate's final recall to Rome to face the music [*Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII, IV: 1–2]. Sound familiar?

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Josephus [*Jewish War*, II, II, 3] also tells us of a resistance fighter named Niger who had to hide to escape the Romans on the battlefield. He took refuge in a cave for three days, during which both friends and foes, after searching for him, abandoned him for dead—until he appeared suddenly to his despairing disciples alive again! Sound familiar?

Joachim Jeremias, Gerd Theissen, and others have long noticed the strange fact that the unnamed Egyptian Prophet (a messiah out of Egypt

like unto Jeroboam) and Theudas (both recounted by Josephus and both explicitly mentioned in Acts 5:36 and 21:38) saw themselves in the role of Joshua *redivivus*. The Egyptian proposed to collapse the walls of Jerusalem as Joshua did those of Jericho, while Theudas said he would divide the Jordan as Joshua did. 'Jesus' is Joshua, too. Can it be there was a whole class of 'Joshua Messiahs,' Jesus Christs?

Should any of these parallels and their possible assimilation into the gospels surprise us when all along we should have seen the implications of the warnings in the Synoptic apocalypse [Mark 13:6, 21–22; Matthew 24:4–5, 23–27; Luke 21:8] not to confuse the messianic prophets and pretenders before the fall of Jerusalem with Jesus himself? Apocalypses always urge their readers not to do what they are in fact known to be doing. Now I think we can see what they had in mind. So if we open the door a good bit wider than Crossan did, we have a striking parallel to what he himself shows with regard to the Old Testament proof-texts generating most of the Passion narrative, only in this case we can peg most of the rest of it as the result of analogous borrowings from contemporary history.

When Crossan makes all four canonical gospels (plus Peter) depend on a single original Passion story, the Cross Gospel, one wonders whether he realizes the implication here either. Again, if the epoch-making death of a historical Jesus had really been a public event of note, even among the small circle of early Christians, how is it possible that all known accounts of it should derive from a single story? The case is not much different if we make all the gospel crucifixion accounts stem from Mark's, as most German

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scholars think (while most British scholars think John and Luke had separate Passion stories which they used independently of Mark's or substituted for it). But if they are all subsequent versions of one story, either Mark or the Cross Gospel, we are mighty close to the suggestion of Bruno Bauer that the whole Jesus story was the creation of Mark, and that others borrowed and embellished it.

Innocence Rescued

I said there was more to be said concerning Crossan's distinction between the 'innocence-rescued' tale and the related 'martyrdom-vindicated' type. Here it is. Crossan theorized that the first type mutated into the second when harsh events made it clear that sometimes God just did not manage to rescue the innocent sufferer on this side of the grave. And, understandably, Crossan sees the second type as more applicable to the story of Jesus. Actually, he posits a mixture of the two types to account for the Passion narrative. But I wonder if, again, he has faced up to the implications of his theory. For I think there is ample evidence that underlying the present canonical forms of all four gospels there is a version of Jesus' Passion which conforms perfectly to the original innocence-rescued type.

Let us be clear on one point: the rescue of the innocent one *in this life* is really integral to the genre, because the righteous sufferer is not just innocent, he is a wise man as well, in every case cited. And, over-optimistic or not, the whole point is, as often stated in the Book of Proverbs, that the wise man always wins in the end. The wise man may receive threats and scoffing, but it is his wisdom that triumphs in the end. Wisdom always turns out to have been the best policy. Otherwise we should sacrifice the central point of wisdom teaching: that it is the sure-fire way of living successfully in this world. When one shifts to the idea of vindicated martyrdom (*i.e.*, in the invisible next world), one is dealing in an entirely different commodity, an apocalyptic mutation of wisdom, the wisdom of God which appears to be foolishness to men. Absolutely crucial to the wisdom stories Nickelsburg discusses is the old idea that the wise man will not in the end be abandoned to the evil, because righteousness consists

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in what is wise, shrewd, prudent, while wickedness is essentially foolishness, short-sightedness, the failure to foresee final outcomes. The whole point is that whereas an apocalyptic promise of *postmortem* vindication requires faith in the unseen, the prudent counsel that the wise must ultimately win after many attempts on him by the foolish, takes no faith, only insight such as these stories seek to provide: "There! You see what happens if you are wise?"

All four gospels betray evidence of their dependence on a prior innocence-rescued version in which Jesus did not die but rather escaped death at the last minute. This may be because there was an original *Cross Gospel* which read this way, or because whatever other common sources the gospels used had first told it this way. Let us review several details of the Passion narrative with this possibility in mind, and we will see what new sense they make of the text.

First, Jesus prays in Gethsemane that the Socratic cup of martyrdom may pass him by, though if God remains implacable, Jesus, humble servant that he is, is quite willing to carry the cross (or to let the cross carry him). We ought to be able to discern here the anticipation that Jesus' humble willingness would be rewarded after all. He would get his wish precisely because he hadn't insisted on it. Again, when Jesus' tormentors goad him, "Let this Christ, this king of Israel, come down from the cross—then we'd believe!" we ought to be sensitive enough to detect the irony: he will! That is, he will come down from the cross alive, though they will not know it! And he does when he is knocked out by the application of whatever was in that sponge the guards gave him to drink. Note that when Joseph of Arimathea approaches Pilate to request custody of the corpse, the procurator marvels that Jesus can already be dead, when crucifixion was designed to take days to kill the poor wretches. Now surely this detail, the premature death of Jesus, is one shoe dropped, and we are to wait for the other to fall. As long as we read the story as issuing in the miraculous resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we never hear the other shoe drop. But originally we would have. Jesus would have appeared, not *restored* to life, but *still* alive (as he actually does in Luke—see below).

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We can make sense of the cry of dereliction from the cross if we realize that Mark did not intend to show Jesus despairing of God. The clue is that, as anyone can see, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is the beginning of Psalm 22, and that this Psalm, after all its lamenting, ends on a note of hope for final deliverance, even when it seems impossible, at the last moment. Surely Mark or his source (perhaps the Cross Gospel) was winking to the reader that this prayer would be

answered—even on the cross itself death might be averted, and was averted.

Why does Matthew bother to inform us that Joseph was a wealthy man and that he buried Jesus in his own tomb? Not because he was trying to fashion a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9, “They made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death,” because Matthew pointedly makes Joseph anything but a wicked man; he is a disciple of Jesus [Matthew 27:57]! No, we must seek the key in the narrative logic of the Hellenistic novels popular from the seventh century BCE through the early centuries CE, in which we have several cases of the heroine falling into a cataleptic coma and being prematurely entombed. As she is invariably an aristocrat (as in soap operas today), it is an opulent tomb. Grave robbers see the tomb has been sealed and decide to break in and loot the rich funerary tokens. Just as they are breaking through, the heroine sits up alive. The robbers have unwittingly saved her life, and all because she was buried in a rich tomb! So with Jesus—he was set free by tomb-looters who did not find the silver and gold promised by the facade of Joseph’s stately tomb, but only a man stirring out of a coma. Presumably they fled in superstitious terror, as some characters still do in the gospels as we read them [Mark 16:8; Matthew 28:4].

It is also worth noting that the very same novels (Chariton’s *Chaireas and Callirhoe*, Xenophon’s *Ephesian Tale*, Achilles Tatius’ *Ethiopian Story*, *etc.*)[49] often included a scene in which the hero, pursuing the kidnapped heroine, runs afoul of an evil king or governor and is sentenced to the cross or even actually crucified,

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only he always gets a last minute reprieve or somehow survives being crucified.

Some readers may object that John’s gospel has Jesus stabbed in the ribcage while crucified [19:34] and then later has Thomas probe the spear wound to demonstrate that Jesus was truly dead and equally truly restored to life [20:27]. But the protesting-too-much vehemence of this narrative (especially 19:35) makes it obvious that John was trying to rebut a rival version of the story in which it was not so clear Jesus had really died. Instead, perhaps he had revived from his coma and gone among the

Diaspora to teach the Greeks [John 7:35]. Thus John furnishes us with the exception that proves the rule.

Luke's reunion scene after the cross and burial is strikingly reminiscent of that in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* in which the sage rejoins his mourning disciples after the latter have given him up for dead, knowing he was to stand trial before the evil emperor Domitian. Little known to them, Apollonius escaped death, vanishing into thin air from the imperial throne room and teleporting across the Mediterranean into the midst of his disciples. At first they think Apollonius has died but returned from the dead (*i.e.*, appeared as a ghost) to bid them farewell. But Apollonius extends his hands and bids them touch him to convince themselves that he is still alive, by divine providence, and not raised from the dead as a ghost.

The Lukan scene is practically identical. He shows them the corporeality of his hands and feet (nothing is said of showing them Johannine wounds in the side). Later Apollonius ascends bodily into heaven. Luke's account parallels the same features: Jesus miraculously reappears to his huddled disciples to reveal himself alive, *still* alive, and then later he ascends into heaven [Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9]. Even the dialogues Luke has added to these inherited scenes speak only of crucifixion and suffering, not of death.

Crossan is right: eventually the innocence-rescued tale was combined with the martyrdom-vindicated form, but it is not as if the gospel writers appropriated an already conflated prototype, as
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Crossan supposes. On the contrary, John the evangelist (perhaps Matthew as well) combined a story of the innocent Jesus rescued from death with later doctrines whereby Jesus must have actually died and risen miraculously from the dead. It was the gospel story-teller(s) who mutated the one genre into the other in Jesus' case, harmonizing two popular versions: Jesus' survival of the cross and Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

The Lost Gospel

If the implications unleashed by John Dominic Crossan tend to erode the story of the historical Jesus to a far greater extent than he or his many readers seem to realize, may we at least draw a boundary around the *teaching* of Jesus? After all, the New Questers were pretty much content to settle upon a small set of authentic sayings that might afford an insight into the mind of the historical Jesus, no matter what he may or may not have done. Burton Mack is quite willing to dissolve most of the gospel narrative into fiction (see his *A Myth of Innocence*, 1988). But he, too, thinks we can keep back a good supply of representative sayings that will characterize for us a historical Jesus and his teaching. This he finds preserved in the Q Document, or as he likes to call it, the Lost Gospel or the Book of Q (*The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, 1993). 'Q' is a German abbreviation denoting the *Quelle* or source of sayings that Matthew and Luke used in common that they did not derive from Mark.

Scholars have always felt that with Q they were especially close to the historical Jesus. In the heyday of the Two-Document hypothesis (that Matthew and Luke had both separately incorporated both Mark's gospel and Q into their own) Mark shared that honor with Q. Scholars tended to grant Mark priority as being more likely historical than Matthew or Luke. And one can at least show that at several points Mark's theological conceptions are earlier and less sophisticated (or less extravagant) than those of Matthew and Luke, because the changes the two later gospels made to their source Mark are easily seen. But then Wrede (Schweitzer's "thoroughgoing
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skeptic") showed how Mark was far from a scissors and paste compiler (much less a reporter). Wrede discerned a complex pattern of theological rewriting already evident in Mark. In fact, compared with Mark, the later writers who used him seem less sophisticated on some points, such as Mark's elaborate 'messianic secret' theme which they appear not to have picked up on.

This left Q as the best candidate for a pre-gospel look at the historical Jesus. Mack certainly thinks so. Indeed, he believes that the historical Jesus revealed by the Q gospel is so different from the Jesus of Christian dogma as to necessitate the root-and-branch rejection of the

latter as debunked by the former. Of course, that is nothing new; it was pretty much the same way the original liberal Protestant Questers viewed the matter. What is new, however, is the portrait of Jesus that emerges from the careful work of Mack, John S. Kloppenborg, Leif Vaage, and others on the 'stratigraphy' of Q.[50] For it turns out that Q is not simply a pristine, untracked snow-field either. Like Mark, the Q source seems to have undergone theological retooling. But Mack and his fellow Q-questers are reasonably confident they can peel back the subsequent layers and reach back to the original sayings collection they call Q1.

With F. Gerald Downing (*Cynics and Christian Origins*, 1992) and others, Mack sees Q as essentially a collection of sayings and anecdotes reflecting the ancient popular philosophy of Cynicism, founded by Antisthenes of Athens and Diogenes of Sinope in the generation after Socrates. Cynics were irreverent radicals who moved from place to place without family, home, or possessions, preaching, often with sarcastic invective, their message of the excellence of living in accordance with nature's plan. One need fear no thief if one has no property. One need not bother with jealousy or with domestic drudgery if one has no marriage. Government, private property, even clothing, and especially money, are all [begin p. 40]

artificial conventions concocted by people too clever for their own good. God's will for the creation is revealed clearly for all to see in the freedom of the birds of the air and the beasts of the field which have no jobs or kings or worries. Nothing unnatural can be good, and nothing natural can be bad. Cynics blessed those who cursed them and loved their persecutors. Some were ascetics, others were libertines, heedless of the condemnations of the bourgeois. They preached the government of Zeus (= the Kingdom of God), living in accord with nature by simple common sense. They urged their hearers to let goods and kindred go and wander through the wide world. They lived by begging and of course encouraged generosity.

Mack and his colleagues have shown that beneath the present text of the reconstructed Q can be discerned an original collection divided into seven thematic sections, none of which include anything about the authority of Jesus or threats of eschatological judgment to come. Subsequent layers of Q add predictions of the coming of the apocalyptic Son of Man, but no Q sayings refer to the earthly Jesus as the Son of Man

or Messiah. No Q saying from any stratum ever mentions Jesus' death, much less his resurrection. So Q would seem to have been only subsequently Christianized, and never nearly so thoroughly as Mark.

Mack reasonably asks why the compilers of Q would have left out all mention of the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus had they believed in these things. And we must assume they recorded what they believed to be of importance about Jesus. We have no evidence of the Q community believing anything they did not record, obviously. There are simply no grounds to assume that all early Jesus-followers believed the same things. Just the opposite: the minimally Christological Q counts as strong evidence that at least this quarter of early Christianity (if that is even the proper word for the Q community) had no particular doctrine about Jesus or Christ at all. Q (especially Q1) implies a radically multiform early Christianity.

Mack's estimate of the (non-)theological proclivities of Q might be said to receive a kind of corroboration from a neglected source: the Islamic Agrapha, or Sufi Sayings of Jesus. There are scores of
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aphorisms and apophthegms attributed to Jesus among the writings of the Sufi ascetics. Here is a community of wandering ascetics taking Jesus as their example and attributing their sayings to him. In this Q-like material, Jesus is frequently addressed as "O Spirit of God," which denotes not the divine nature of Jesus (impossible in Islam), but rather his unworldliness and itinerant asceticism (as Mary Douglas's anthropological-sociological analysis of 'spirit language' would also confirm).[51] We find nothing about Jesus dying or rising from the dead. What else may the Sufis have believed about Jesus that these sayings happen not to record? Lucky for us, we know: as Muslims, they certainly lacked any and all belief in Jesus' death or resurrection.

The Big Bang versus the Big Mack

Mack bids us dare to part with the traditional model of Christian origins, shared even by Bultmann and other supposed radicals, which has it that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and that three days later the disciples experienced visions of the Risen Christ. Perhaps the resurrection was a hallucination; no matter, it was the 'Big Bang' from

which all the diverse forms of Christianity (Gnostic, Catholic, Ebionite-Jewish, *etc.*) emerged by hook or by crook. All forms of Christianity would have represented various ways of interpreting this 'Christ event.' So say most scholars, whether conservative or liberal. But not Mack. He suggests instead that what we have all been doing is gullibly adopting the foundation myth of one of the many kinds of early Christianity. Since there is no reason to believe the Q community (or that which produced the similar Gospel of Thomas) had the slightest interest in or knowledge of a Passion and resurrection, why should we assume that the Q document or the Q community stems from such an ostensible resurrection? No, Mack says, it is time to recognize that the resurrection was one of many origin-myths cherished by but one of a wide diversity of Jesus movements and Christ cults all over Palestine and Syria.

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In *A Myth of Innocence* Mack sets forth a typology of the various Jesus movements and Christ cults to which we owe various segments and strata of the New Testament writings. He ultimately seems to leave open the question whether these very different Christianities stem from a common origin point in the historical Jesus. If they did, we might call this common genesis a 'Little Bang,' since it would be the man Jesus himself, not the theological supernova of the resurrection, that would be the primordial singularity. But it seems hard to imagine that Mack would be willing, in effect, just to push the traditional single-origin concept back a few steps. Though he hesitates to say so, he seems to be implying a multiple origin theory. Christianity grew from several roots, not one. To borrow the conceptuality of Helmut Koester and James M. Robinson in *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (1971),[52] if we plot the trajectories of Christian evolution through the New Testament documents as Mack does, we will come up with multiple Christianities all the way back, the gradual federation and assimilation of disparate Christ mystery cults and Jesus movements which at first had nothing to do with each other.

We would, in other words, have a situation exactly analogous to that of the ancient Israelite tribal league. The Old Testament writers appear to have borrowed for their (fictive) depiction of early Israel the Greek model of the *amphictyony*, a confederation of separate tribes around

a central, shared shrine.[53] In any case, the tribes did not stem from and were not named after the Twelve sons of Jacob. Many of them must have been named for their traditional totems or gods (Zebulon, Asher, Gad), others for their homeland (Ephraim = 'the people on Mt. Ephrath;' Benjamin = 'sons of the South,' as in *Yemen* today) or occupation (Issachar = 'burden-bearers'). Once the tribes of Israel had come together, they sealed their bond by positing a mythical eponymous ancestor, Israel/Jacob, whose twelve sons were imagined as the progenitors of each tribe. Each tribal patriarch was accorded the name of one of the tribes, even though
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some were not even personal names. I think the same sort of thing happened when various factions and sects came together to form early Christianity, then hid or forgot their disparate origins.

Implicit in Mack's alternative to the Big-Bang model of Christian origins would seem to be what we must call the Big-Mack model: an assembling of various ingredients to make one big, oozing melange of Christianity. And Jesus would be the analogue, in the Big-Mack model, to the eponymous-mythical patriarch Israel/Jacob. And in case you hadn't noticed, such a Jesus figurehead would fit perfectly with the composite figure of the gospels who seems to be an amalgam of ill-fitting pieces from Old Testament proof-texts and borrowings from contemporary messiahs and prophets. His patchwork character derives from the conflationary nature of the movement for which he serves as eponymous figurehead.

Who is this broken man?[54]

Whether Mack himself sees things as I have just outlined them is immaterial. The inferences seem to me to be natural, perhaps even inevitable. But let me hasten to point out that a multiple-root origin theory for Christianity would not automatically mean there had been no original historical Jesus. Indeed, Mack certainly holds for, so to speak, at least one historical Jesus, the sage whose sayings have been collected for our edification in Q1. But, again, as with Crossan, I wonder if Mack's work does not set loose implications that he himself does not yet appreciate. Let me outline three factors that would imply that Q1, far from allowing us

access for the first time to the historical Jesus, is instead inconsistent with a historical Jesus.

First, do we receive from the Q1 sayings and anecdotes a striking and consistent picture of a historical individual? Mack thinks we do. There is a sly sense of humor coupled with common sense and prophetic anger. There is a definite outlook on life. And thus, one might think, a definite personality, a real character. But no. The problem is that once we discern the pronounced Cynic character of the sayings
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(and I defy anyone to read the comparative material Downing and Mack provide, truckloads of it in Downing's collection *Christ and the Cynics*, 1988, and deny the strong and distinctive Cynic coloring of the Q1 material), we have an alternate explanation for the salty, striking, and controversial 'personality' of the material. It conveys not the personality of an individual but that of a movement, the sharp and humorous Cynic outlook on life. What we detect so strongly in the texts is their Cynicism. The fact that so many Q1 sayings so strongly parallel so many Cynic maxims and anecdotes proves the point for the simple reason that the Cynic materials used for comparison stem from *many different* Cynic philosophers over several centuries.

Second, the very nature of Q1 (or Q period, for that matter) as a sayings collection would imply that the name to which the maxims are attributed is a fictive figurehead, like King Solomon in the Book of Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Qoheleth/Ecclesiastes (to say nothing of the Odes of Solomon, the Psalms of Solomon, the Song of Solomon, the Testament of Solomon, and the Key of Solomon!). The Wisdom of Jesus ben-Sira (or Sirach) is only an apparent exception, since while the whole collection may well come from the pen of Jesus (another one!) son of Sirach, we must imagine him as a collector of traditional wisdom, *i.e.*, of the venerable sayings of other, anonymous sages before him.

Think of the rabbis whose sayings are preserved in the *Pirke Aboth*. Most of these great figures are credited with one or two memorable sayings apiece. The blithe complacence with which Christian scholars have credited Jesus with such a huge store of wise sayings only reveals anew the implicit theological bias of supposedly critical scholars. They

have just assumed that Jesus was Wisdom incarnate, and that therefore an infinite number of wise and pithy sayings might be attributed to him, while only one or two came from mere mortals like the rabbis or the Greek philosophers.

Parenthetically, Gerd Theissen[55] remarks that while we do find many similar miracle stories told of other thaumaturges such as
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Hanina ben-Dosa, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Apollonius, *etc.*, we see nothing like the huge flood of miracles ascribed by Christians to Jesus (not that he is suggesting many or most of them are historically authentic). But in fact we do see such a flood of miracle healings attributed to an ancient competitor of Jesus, Asclepius, son of Apollo, and patron of numerous healing spas around the Mediterranean. The parallel is significant because the great number of Asclepius stories stem from the great number of Asclepius franchises, each of them generating advertising propaganda in the form of testimonials of satisfied customers. By analogy, the great volume of healing and other miracle stories about Jesus stems not from recollections of an historical individual but rather from multiple centers of evangelistic and healing propaganda in the name of the healing god Jesus.

The same goes for the remarkable volume of wise sayings attributed to Jesus: the name denotes the figurehead for the particular wisdom tradition (‘*Poor Richard’s Almanac*’), not that of a historical individual. Another analogy would be all the 613 ‘laws of Moses’ in the Hebrew Scripture. Does any historian think Moses wrote all or even most of them? It is a good question whether he wrote a single one.

Crucified Sophist

Third, there is the problem of whether Cynicism was a known commodity in the Palestine of the first half of the first century CE (the usual era assigned to the historical Jesus). There seems to be no decisive evidence either way. Downing is content to argue, not unreasonably, that since we do know Cynicism was widespread in the general time period and in the general area (*e.g.*, Meleager the Cynic, active in nearby but thoroughly Gentile Gadara, died 50 BCE), the burden of proof is on the one who would exempt Galilee from being afloat on the winds of doctrine sweeping the Hellenistic world. And besides, reasons Downing, the

sayings themselves constitute the strongest possible evidence that Cynicism had penetrated Palestine, since there is just no minimizing the Cynic character of them.

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But E.P. Sanders[56] and Richard A. Horsley[57] are pretty confident they can shoulder the burden of proof Downing assigns them. Sanders makes a good case that in the first half of the first century CE, Palestine, including Galilee, was thoroughly resistant to Hellenization, outside of the several new cities Herod the Great had built and populated with Gentiles. One might sum up the gist of Sanders's argument by pointing out that if Meleager's presence in Gadara is normative for Galilee in Jesus' day, then pig-herding might as well have been, too [Mark 5:11 *ff*.]. But it wasn't. It is a difficult issue, one not to be resolved here. But suppose Sanders is right, that Galilee in Jesus' day was not where one might run into Cynics and Cynic philosophy. What does one do with Downing's evidence of the Cynic coloring of the gospel sayings? They do not suddenly start sounding less Cynic, more apocalyptic or rabbinical. Have we reached an impasse?

Not at all. The answer is clear, though some will not like the sound of it: the sayings of Q1 are Cynic all right; they just don't come from Jesus. If we must locate Cynicism elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, and if Q1 bears ample marks of Cynic origin, then Q1 must come from somewhere else in the Mediterranean world. Why not view it as a collection of originally anonymous Cynic sayings only later attributed to Jesus, just as the Cynic Epistles contain numerous Cynic teachings only subsequently given the names of famous Cynics including Crates, Socrates, and Diogenes?

As Abraham J. Malherbe has demonstrated (*Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, 1989),[58] the Pauline Epistles give ample evidence of Christian interaction with Cynic, Stoic, and Epicurean competitors. Thus why not assume that Q1 comes from the same quarters? All we need to suppose is what we know from other sources anyway,

[begin p. 47]

that some Cynics were attracted, for reasons of their own, to the Christian movement. In his ruthless lampoon of Proteus Peregrinus, Lucian of Samosata (*ca*. 150 CE) tells us that Proteus, a Cynic, had also joined the

Christian community in Palestine and at length rose to such prominence in it that he became revered almost as a second founder of the Christian movement, held in reverence second only to “the crucified sophist” himself. Lucian goes on to say that Proteus had written books which became accepted as Christian scripture. Lucian’s report attests the plausibility of supposing that Cynics could become Christians and contribute to Christian literature writings that were still manifestly Cynic in content.

Someone might object, pointing to the Jewish terms and concerns presupposed in various Q sayings. But all we need to assume is that Cynicism came into Hellenistic Christianity by way of the God-fearers attached to the margin of Hellenistic Jewish synagogues. Philo was, after all, deeply influenced by Platonism and Stoicism. Jewish elements in Q1 hardly demand that the sayings in question originated with Jesus.

So it seems quite likely that not even the Q source, not even Q1, goes back to Jesus. If it does not, what have we left? If there was ever a historical Jesus of Nazareth, questing for him would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. We can no more be sure there was a historical Jesus than we can be sure a historical Moses stands behind the stories and sayings attributed to him.

Silence in Heaven

We end with a nearly absolute skepticism or agnosticism about the historical Jesus. And the irony is that it is the research, the methods, and the implications of the most up-to-date mainstream New Testament scholarship, thought by most to make a genuine historical Jesus available to us for the first time, which lead us, when taken to their logical conclusions, to that skepticism. The work of John Dominic Crossan and Burton L. Mack tends to repristinate some of the most radical critical positions long ago dismissed by mainstream scholars, namely that there was no historical Jesus, or

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that the New Testament Jesus is a composite figure based on various biblical and historical prototypes, or that in an earlier gospel version Jesus escaped death on the cross.

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Chapter Two:

Mythic Jesus

The suspicion that there was never a historical figure corresponding to the Christian savior appears to go back at least as far as the second century CE. We find echoes of it in the writings of Justin Martyr. In his polemical treatise *Dialogue with Trypho,* he portrays himself engaged in debate with a rabbi (perhaps intended as the renowned Rabbi Tarphon). How closely the work matches up with any actual debate we do not know, but that hardly matters. Justin is at least setting forth the kind of thing Jews and Christians said on the subjects. And he has Trypho assert that Christians have merely invented a Christ for themselves. Those who wish to dismiss the Christ Myth theory as the modern invention of conspiracy theory cranks like to read this as if the Jewish charge was simply that Christians had trumped up their hero Jesus, a real figure of the past, into the ostensible Messiah, but that they were kidding themselves. But that is hardly what the text says. It seems pretty clear, does it not, that Justin knew Jews claimed that Jesus Christ was a figment of the Christian imagination? This is certainly no proof that there was no historical Jesus, only that some thought so already in Justin's time.

The Christ Myth theory is really a set of theories. There are numerous approaches today, some mutually exclusive alternatives, some possibly compatible. But this very fact hints of the strength of the approach, since it implies that numerous scholars have arrived at the same conclusion (Jesus didn't exist) by different routes. Thus historical Jesus skepticism is not a single precarious chain of dubious assertions. Just as there are many reconstructions of the historical Jesus (indeed it is almost impossible to keep up with them), so are there a number of Christ-Myth theories, and theorists on this side of the question often disagree quite as vehemently as historical Jesus scholars do. In the rest of this chapter, I discuss various Christ-Myth theories, and I am not too friendly toward

some
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of them. Unlike apologists for fundamentalism, I do not welcome any and all arguments on behalf of a conclusion I start out with and hope to ‘prove’ by any means at hand. And if someone wishes to point out that the bewildering variety of approaches makes it more difficult for us to crown one of them the winner, I will gladly agree, just as I agree that historical-Jesus reconstructions, being a dime a dozen, constitute an embarrassment of riches, since so many of them seem viable and plausible. But that is not really an embarrassment for either side. We are not (supposed to be!) dogmatists, only historians. And historians are happy to admit the tentative, working-hypothesis character of their theories and are therefore happy to entertain many theories. Let a hundred flowers bloom!

Wells-prings of Wisdom[1]

G.A. Wells, emeritus professor of German language and literature at the University of London, approaches gospel scholarship as an outsider. Odd thing about outsiders in this field: Christian apologists always declare them to be refreshingly objective when they urge conservative positions but deride them as rank amateurs and cranks when they do not. Wells has suffered much abuse, falling into the latter category, but he always answers as a gentleman, as in two of his latest books.

All of Wells’s books (well, almost all—see below) have in common their advocacy of the Christ-Myth theory once argued powerfully by Arthur Drews,[2] Bruno Bauer,[3] John M. Robertson,[4]
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William Benjamin Smith,[5] and others. The theory came under severe criticism, and scarcely anyone today will take it seriously. Even the supposed arch-skeptic Rudolf Bultmann once said that no one in his right mind doubts that Jesus existed.[6] In the face of this universal disdain, it has taken Wells a good deal of courage to rehabilitate the theory for our day. And it is important to recognize that Wells has significantly modified the Christ-Myth theory. First, he is more modest in his claims than his predecessors. He maintains only that the notion that Jesus is pure legend is at least as plausible a reading of the evidence as any of the critical theories

that, while demythologizing Jesus, assume that he did exist as a historical entity. He does not try to rule out competing views as absurd or incredible. Second, Wells appeals for the mythic prototype for Jesus not to the Hellenistic Mystery Religions with their dying-and-rising gods, but rather to Hellenistic Jewish speculation on the figure of personified Wisdom. In texts like Proverbs chapter 8, Sirach chapter 1, Wisdom of Solomon chapter 7, and 1 Enoch 42:1–2, Wisdom was said to have first assisted God in creating the world, then to have descended into it to summon foolish mortals to repent and learn from her, to have been rejected, and to have returned to heaven. Wells thinks that, just as Philo thought the Word of God had been personified in the Old Testament patriarchs, so was Jesus a kind of historicized version of Wisdom. Paul, on Wells's reading, believed that Jesus, Wisdom incarnate, had in some vaguely conceived past time come to earth and been crucified by hostile supernatural forces [1 Cor. 2:8], but of a Galilean prophet and teacher, of a miracle worker born of a virgin and executed by Pontius Pilate, Paul has nothing at all to say. For Paul, Jesus was barely a historical figure, little more than Asclepius or Hercules, whom legend also made figures of the (vague) historical past.[7] It was only subsequent to Paul that the legend of the (recent)
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Galilean Jesus began to grow. Sayings became ascribed to him that Paul would certainly have quoted as germane to many subjects he discussed, had they been coined already in his day. Only a scarce few later New Testament writings, mainly the spurious 2 Timothy, make any reference to gospel-like sayings or episodes.

Wells's case is so shocking to the conventionally religious that many of them seem unable to entertain his views long enough to understand them before firing off polemical broadsides. And a major reason Wells has continued to produce books on the same topic is to keep responding to his critics, lest his theory become buried in misrepresentation. Each new defense brings some new facet of the matter to light. The result is that, while each of Wells's books stands on its own, anyone who has read one or more of his previous books will still find every new one, including *The Jesus Legend*,[8] illuminating. The book spends minimal time setting forth the case for the Christ-Myth theory and goes on to consider a fascinating array of allied topics, such as whether the ethics attributed to Jesus are as noble as even many unbelievers say they

are, and whether the gospels are anti-Semitic. He also provides case studies on the work of particular apologists like Protestant John Warwick Montgomery and Catholic John P. Meier.

But there is even more reason for the long-time Wells reader to look into his book, *The Jesus Myth*,[9] because here Wells proves once and for all he is no crank riding a hobby-horse. For in that most rare of scholarly spectacles, we see him changing his mind! In *The Jesus Myth*, Wells retreats from the pure Christ-Myth position, granting that Burton L. Mack has established a credible portrait of Jesus as a Cynic-like sage whose sayings are contained in the earliest stratum of the Q Document. Wells is still quite adamant that the full-blown figure of Jesus Christ in the gospels is a myth. The case is similar
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to that of King Arthur: there may well have been some Romanized British war chief back in the sixth century, who in some measure gave rise to the figure of King Arthur, but that hardly means that Mallory's Arthur is a historical figure. Still, we must not minimize the importance of what may seem a subtle shift. What Wells now says is not essentially different from the estimate of Bultmann and other Christian radical critics who have long admitted that only a largely unknown, minimally historical Jesus lies somewhere behind the myth-screen of the Church's dogma. With *The Jesus Myth* Wells has come much closer to the mainstream.

Should we conclude that the latest Wells has refuted the earlier Wells? I do not. For it seems to me that Burton Mack's arguments establishing the Cynic color of the Q sayings actually undermine their value as evidence for an historical Jesus. The discernible consistency, as well as the distinctive 'tang' of the sayings, are just as likely to stem not from one gifted imagination (that of a historical Jesus) but rather from the collective style of the Cynic movement. And the sheer number of sayings imply we are dealing with a collection compiled from various originally unnamed sources, later placed under one name proverbial for wisdom, like the collections of proverbs ascribed to Solomon in the Old Testament.

Jigsaw Jesus

Earl Doherty has established himself as today's standard bearer for the re-emergent Christ-Myth theory. *Jesus: Neither God nor Man*[10] is a

greatly expanded edition of his earlier volume, *The Jesus Puzzle*[11] and updates the original case and interacts with the debate as it has raged since the original book. This book was written before Bart D. Ehrman's vilification of Doherty's work in his scurrilous, error-riddled tirade *Did Jesus Exist?*[12] Perhaps the most ludicrous feature
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in that book is Ehrman's haughty disdain of Doherty because of Doherty's lack of paper credentials. Of course a true scholar does not invoke such irrelevancies, recognizing instead that the quality of one's scholarly work is the only relevant 'credential,' a lesson Ehrman apparently failed to learn from 2 Corinthians 3:1–2 (assuming he has read it, something he seemingly neglected to do with Doherty's work).

Doherty has a way of bringing to light major questions that have somehow gone without notice in most conventional discussions of the historical Jesus. For one, he asks, can we imagine any scenario in which it becomes plausible for peasant followers of a rabbi or a healer to have elevated him to no less than full Godhood and identified him with the cosmic principle of the intermediary Logos from Platonic-Stoic Philonism? This is what Crossan, Bultmann, and most other critics have thought happened. What an odd thing! Hero-worship? Sure. But how and why would it take such a form? Is not such translation into ontological abstractions something more at home when a movement begins, like the Stoics, to rationalize, to philosophize, an inherited set of myths to make their beliefs more intellectually respectable? And of course that is what Doherty says happened: the rationalization of a pure myth of a Son of God who, like imaginary deities before him, sacrificed himself for the sake of redemption or creation *but never visited the earth in the flesh*.

But suppose the first Christians *had* reasoned (or emoted) thus: "What a guy! Egalitarian! Feminist! Socialist! A teller of tales! The man for others! A heck of a guy! He must have been the Logos intermediate between God and the first act of creation!" Why does Paul never say that such a leap was made, referring only to a Son of God perishing at the hands of the angelic archons? Why does he not only not remark on the astounding 'fact' of a man being suddenly reinterpreted/revealed as the Logos but never even say anything about his Jesus as a figure with human deeds or traits? If there had ever been a human Jesus who ate, drank, slept,

taught, walked from one village to the next, performed miracles, had disciples, *etc.*, Paul keeps it all a secret pretty well. If his Christ was, as the subsequent gospels paint him, such a fountain of wise sayings and parables, why does Paul quote none of them?

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Doherty knows that apologists, for whom it would be convenient if Paul *had* known the kind of thing about Jesus found in the gospels, counter that Paul does once or twice refer to ‘words of the Lord’ which they take to be quotes from Jesus of Nazareth. But it is easy to show that these must almost certainly be ‘words of knowledge,’ ‘words of wisdom’ [1 Cor. 12:8] which Paul thinks he has received from the heavenly Lord Jesus. And when we find numerous Jesus-style maxims in the epistles, they are never actually ascribed to Jesus, something utterly without plausible explanation if the New Testament authors meant to settle some point by appeal to the absolute authority of the Christ. Rather, Doherty reasons, these are sayings only subsequently attributed to Jesus once Christians re-imagined him as a recent historical figure and a teacher.

Apologists urge that the Book of Acts shows us how an author who certainly knew the whole gospel-tradition full of sayings of an earthly Jesus (Acts being a sequel to Luke’s gospel), pointedly avoided using them, when he might have peppered the speeches of Peter, Paul, and Stephen with them. Doesn’t that show that, for whatever reason, as with the epistles, there might have been a time and a place for quoting Jesus, and that that was the gospels? Then the absence of Jesus/gospel tradition from the letters need not denote their authors’ ignorance of such material, or, as Doherty argues, the non-existence of such material at the time. Not a bad argument. But Doherty’s reply is better: insofar as the Acts author seeks to avoid gross historical anachronism and to make ‘apostolic preaching’ sound duly primitive (as when he uses the occasional Pauline ‘justification' language in 13:39 or Petrine adoptionistic terminology in 2:36), wouldn’t he have avoided Peter and the others quoting Jesus *because people remembered that they hadn’t?*[13]

And we can, must, turn the argument around: if a historical Jesus actually said some of the things credited to him in the gospels (*e.g.*, mandating the Gentile Mission, decreeing all food kosher), why

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are subsequent Christians unaware of it? Why all the debates over the issues? Why the need for visions and Holy Ghost voices to settle the matter? See Acts 10–11. No, the ostensible Jesus sayings on these points must be the fabrications of parties to those very debates.

On the usual Sunday School version of Christian origins, we would expect to read in the epistles how the writers' religion stems from the teachings (and, of course, the heroic martyrdom) of the recent figure Jesus of Nazareth. But we never do. Doherty again points out what ought to be obvious but has become invisible through familiarity: Paul and 1 Peter repeatedly trace the Christian message back to the revelation of God's Son to the apostles who proclaim him, specifically the revelation via scriptural exegesis (Rom. 16:25–26; 1 Cor. 15:3–4; Eph. 1:9–10; Titus 1:1–3). In other words, 'knowledge' of God's Son came to early Christians the same way 'knowledge' of the Adam Kadmon came to the Kabbalists: through esoteric interpretation of texts, not from historical information or memory. This is why Paul [2 Cor. 3:4–18] can compare *himself*, not Jesus, to Moses as the human founder of a new dispensation. He was thinking of Jesus as more like Yahweh than like Moses or Aaron: a God revealed, not a revealer of God. The early Christians were not seeking proof-texts, whether natural or contrived, for remembered events, to prove they had been prophesied; rather, they were surmising what *must* have happened based on esoteric interpretation of texts taken out of context by the Spirit's leading.

Do the epistles regard the apostles as apprentices or successors appointed by an historical Jesus? No, it is God himself, directly, who has entrusted Peter, Paul, *etc.*, with the apostolic office [Matt. 16:17; Gal. 2:7–8], no human agency. And the criterion? The occasion? An apostle must have experienced a vision of the Risen Christ [1 Cor. 9:1], which is not to say a recent historical figure. It might mean that, but what else in the epistles would lead us to think so? If someone today claims to have seen Jesus[14] or the Virgin Mary, they are not
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claiming to be 2, 000 years old. They mean to say that an ancient figure has appeared to them, from heaven, today.

Have you ever noticed how the Pauline and other epistles speak only of the anticipated "coming" of the Lord Jesus, but pointedly *not* of

his *second* coming? I never caught that "little detail," but Doherty did. Of course it would imply that the Christian Savior Jesus had never been on earth before, but that he would soon arrive for the Final Judgment. I realize Hebrews 9:27–28 may constitute an exception, but then again it is late enough to overlap the composition of the gospels and thus may well contain allusions to the gospel story (as also in 5:7), just like 1 Timothy 6:13. Still, it might be argued that the "appearances" of Jesus Hebrews 9:27–28 contemplates are not intended to denote appearances on the earth; see, after all, Mark 13:26; Matthew 24:30: "then will appear the sign of the Son of Man *in heaven*."

Christ Myth theorists have long pointed out the absence in the epistles of well-known (to us) Jesus-sayings in the gospels which would have come in mighty handy when Paul was arguing about taxation, celibacy, circumcision, non-resistance, *etc.*, but Doherty extends this line of thinking to the many scenes in the gospel Jesus *story* which must have proven irresistible to back up various Pauline exhortations—had they been extant and available. ("You should be celibate—Jesus was." Or, "You needn't be celibate; Jesus was married.") But *nada*.

Doherty points out another fascinating item regarding the list of resurrection witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15:3–11. Scholars and apologists alike take this formulaic list as some sort of early Christian creed. Only Doherty grasps the implication: that Jesus appeared to Cephas, the Twelve, James, the apostles, *etc.*, is not offered as evidence for belief in the resurrection of Jesus but rather as a set of *objects* of faith. One had to embrace by an act of faith the notion that Jesus made these appearances. They were not offered as evidence for faith. To appeal to them as evidence is fatally circular.

Earl Doherty's position, his version of the Christ-Myth theory, must be distinguished from that of G.A. Wells, his great modern

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predecessor. Wells did not contend that the earliest Christians did not believe there had ever been an earthly historical Jesus. They believed he had lived on earth at some point in the past, but it was all very vaguely conceived. Wells thinks they were wrong, and that their belief had grown from roots they had already forgotten, primarily the Jewish myth of personified Wisdom, descending from heaven to instruct men on earth,

being shamefully rejected, and returning to heaven. For Wells, there was never an historical Jesus, even though the early Christians as represented in the New Testament epistles believed there once had been. Doherty, by contrast, holds that the earliest Christians envisioned a Jesus figure who had assumed only the apparent *likeness* or *semblance* of mortal flesh to offer himself to the depraved archons, the fallen angels who rule the sub-lunar world according to ancient Jewish cosmology. It was they who put him to an ignominious death, but not on earth, not in real mortal flesh, not in history or with the involvement of historical characters like Pontius Pilate or Caiaphas.

The epistles never hint at human, historical, political involvement. On the one hand, they hold malevolent spirits responsible [1 Cor. 2:6–10; Col. 2:15]. This sacrifice, like that of Purusha in Hindu scripture, took place in heaven [Heb. 8:4–5; 9:11–15], before the creation [Rev. 13:8], amid the evil Powers. As for the human rulers of nations, we are told to obey them with respect, since they never punish the righteous, but only the wicked [Rom. 13:3–4]. Who could have written such a thing if he believed Jesus had been done to death by Rome? Author Doherty has expanded his earlier development of these ideas greatly, making very clear one of the most important but least easily understood features of his theory.

Though space forbids a detailed examination of it here, Doherty provides a careful and detailed survey of scholarly theory concerning the Q Source of sayings shared by Matthew and Luke but not Mark. These, following Burton L. Mack, Doherty ascribes to a Kingdom-of-God movement in Galilee. These pre- or proto-Christians expected the imminent coming of the apocalyptic Son of Man who would vindicate them before their persecutors and those indifferent to their
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preaching. Eventually the name Jesus was attached to individual sayings, and the whole collection was considered his. The coming Son of Man was merged, when the two movements encountered one another, with the Son of God whom Paul preached had died and risen in the unseen world and would soon come to earth.

Further chapters reexamine the whole range of early Christian writings, especially those of the Church Fathers, showing how we have usually been too quick to assume they had turned the historical Jesus into

a philosophical abstraction in order to win over philosophers. Doherty argues instead that these men had maintained the earlier version of the abstract Logos-Christ.

Earl Doherty is a masterful writer and an indefatigable scholar who leaves no stone unturned. Any critic who seeks (desperately) to write him off because he writes without establishment academic credentials only demonstrates how far he himself falls short of recognizing real scholarship when he sees it. Has Doherty had to resort to publishing his own book? So did Hume. That's no excuse for anyone interested in the Christ Myth or the historical Jesus not to read this all-encompassing book.

Here Comes the Sun[15]

The very learned Acharya S. (pen name of D.M. Murdock), in *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha, and Christ Unveiled*,[16] marshals an almost unbelievable amount of evidence to show the solar, that is the astro-theological, basis of all religions and mythologies, and to demonstrate that the great savior figures of the world's religions are late historicizations of the sacred sun myths.

I had already found the solar mythology paradigm quite helpful in explaining the origin and character of much of the Old Testament narrative. Ignaz Goldziher, following Max Müller, made a powerful
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case for the solar/lunar/stellar identity of most Genesis (and several other biblical) characters in his masterpiece *Mythology among the Hebrews*.[17] Once one knows what to look for, Isaac, Esau, Enoch, Moses, Samson, and Elijah emerge as obvious candidates for solar myths. And Jesus certainly has many of the same marks. Beyond this, virtually the whole Jesus story deconstructs into various Septuagint rewrites (as Randel Helms[18] shows) and myth-borrowings as the Scandinavian and German History-of-Religions School demonstrated to the satisfaction of anybody but moss-backed apologists. The only remaining question, for me at least, has been whether 'Jesus Christ' was a man transfigured into mythic proportions by the imagination of his admirers, or whether he began as an imaginary deity and was subsequently made historical in the manner suggested for the Greek deities already by the ancient Euhemerus. We will shortly see the perspective Acharya takes on this pivotal question.

She goes much further afield than the title of the book suggests in order to show the virtual ubiquity of particular salvation mythemes and religious symbols. One finds startling parallels between myths and symbols among Christians, Vajrayana Buddhists, and pre-Columbian Mexicans. How can this be? Acharya offers two distinct explanations for the striking phenomenon, and they seem to me to render one another superfluous. Whichever theory you choose, you are rid of the need for the other. First, her catalogue of parallels is so impressive as to press home the question: how can all these disparate cultures have come up, independently, with ceremonial crosses, sacrificed saviors, common myth-plots, *etc.*? Must these things not all be analogous responses by human brains, built the same way all over the earth, to the same stimulus? And what might that stimulus have been? It had to be something available to everybody, everywhere: "Every eye shall see him." What else but the movements of the sun and the other lights through the heavens? We know astrology/astronomy to have been widespread across
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the ancient globe, and when we find such a correspondence among myths and ritual symbols, too, we naturally trace them to the same source. I don't believe I had ever faced the force of this argument before reading this book. Some might prefer to advance a Jungian explanation, but that is pretty much another way of saying the same thing: the deep structures of the mind will spit out the same creations faced with the same raw data. And in this case, those data would seem to have been astronomical.

Before describing her second explanation for the ubiquity of myths and symbols, let me pause to express one qualm. Acharya reasons that the elite clergy of all religions, including Catholic Christianity, must have known full well the essentially solar nature of their doctrine at least until the late Middle Ages. The personification of astrological entities would have been the nursery-school version, the exoteric version handed out to the masses. I do not see much reason for thinking so. Personally, I find it more natural to suppose, with many myth scholars, that raw myths treated stellar entities as direct characters in symbolic myths, but that in subsequent retellings and reinterpretations, the sun, moon, and stars were transformed into anthropomorphic gods and heroes. Hercules must first have been the sun, period. But then people tended to forget that and to

imagine that there had been a demigod hero named Hercules. One can still sniff out his solar origins from clear vestiges of it, like the lion's mane he wore (the sun's rays), the Twelve labors he performed (the zodiac), and the deadly arrows he shot (sunstroke). But you do have to make the connection, because it is no longer overt. Later, *à la* Euhemerus, people begin thinking of these figures as real historical individuals whose memorable greatness led to their mythic exaggeration. This seems like a realistic reading of the history of mythology to me. So I doubt that any hierarchy in the Church (or Buddhism, *etc.*) remained aware of the origin of their faith and its symbols.

We will get to Jesus, but let me just note that, even if all the mythic symbolism is originally astronomical, even including divine crucifixion as a symbol of the sun crossing over the celestial equator,
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that doesn't mean that there couldn't have been a historical Jesus whose followers clothed him in mythic forms first derived from astrology, even if no longer so understood. Is that likely? Stay tuned.

Acharya also argues that the far-flung similarities between myths and faiths are the result of *dissemination*. There was borrowing, cross-pollination, at least where travel was imaginable. She accepts the theories of various nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholars to the effect that just about all ancient languages (at least including Hebrew, Welsh, and Sanskrit) were cognate cousins, and that faith communities as seemingly disparate as Buddhism, Druidism, and Essenism represented different branches of a single denomination whose priests were sometimes in communication with one another. It was a conclave of such secret brotherhoods that invented Christianity. Here, I confess, I am way over my head. I am no linguist, much less a comparative linguist. Some of the writers Acharya cites seem to have been grinding an ax, *e.g.*, to demonstrate that all Western culture had roots in Ireland, including the Bible. She quotes Freemasonry apologists who have their own reasons for wanting to see Egyptian connections all over the place. But motive matters not. They might be right anyway. But I can't say. I know I was quite surprised reading Jaan Puhvel's comprehensive *Comparative Mythology*[19] to see how modern scholarship does trace a wide arc of linguistic and mythic dissemination from India to Ireland. But does

Phoenician Baal equal Irish Bel? Do the Samana ascetics of India have anything to do with Semitic sun-worship? I suspect a lot of this amounts to lucky false cognates. But I can't say. I plead ignorance.

Once I read an erudite essay in which a renowned German expert on Islam argued that H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, *etc.*, seem to have been derived from some unknown, hypothetical Arabic translation of a document by Plutarch. Lovecraft's "Old Ones" equated to the Cabiri. Cthulhu was Kronos, asleep beneath the waves. His undersea prison-palace R'lyeh sounded like Arabic for "boiling," the troubling of the waters above such a sunken citadel. He made all
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manner of connect-the-dots suggestions, all of them very clever, all very striking, but none very likely since Lovecraft almost certainly made all of it up out of his head. What Acharya says sounds good to me, but then so did this. How do I decide? I have my work cut out for me. One thing, though: Max Müller already sought to refute several of the equations Acharya tries to make, following earlier writers, between the Buddhas (enlightened ones) and the ancient Indian sun deity 'Budha.' Likewise, he dismisses the tenability of identifying Odin and the Buddha, something of a stretch on the face of it. All this may be found in Müller's essay "On False Analogies in Comparative Theology."[20] (I must confess I never heard of this important essay—until I read Acharya's own discussion of it! I owe her that, too.) And I admit I do not know enough about the issues involved to presume to say who is correct. Again, my point is that the book is a treasury of fascinating data to be pursued, even as the author has done.

I do not see sufficient reason to posit a world-spanning, age-old group of Illuminati, whether associated with the Masons, the Templars, or whomever. Furthermore, it is Acharya's well-argued brief for universal astro-theology that makes the priestly dissemination theory sound superfluous to me. She doesn't really need it.

Our author has compiled an astonishing amount of data about Krishna and the Buddha, most of which one will never run across in the typical surveys of Hinduism and Buddhism that we pat ourselves on the back for reading. I am particularly interested in her arguments for the solar-mythic origin of the Buddha, because I take quite seriously the

theory (no longer in favor) that there was no one historical founder of Buddhism. But I remain unconvinced that the hagiography of either of these divine gentlemen ever featured a crucifixion or a resurrection. All right, one account of Krishna has him pinned to a tree by an arrow, *à la* Achilles, but is that really close enough to crucifixion? Maybe so. It seems slippery to me, but that is a subjective judgment call. Then again, it wouldn't be if the supposed
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parallel were closer. And there are some line-drawing reproductions of crucifixes found in India, some in modern times, some undatable. But nobody can say for sure whom they represent.

Again and again, Acharya finds herself hemmed in by old writers who never elevated their claims above the level of hearsay (as she herself points out). Kersey Graves (*The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*)[21] assures the reader that he has before him plenty of original documentation for his claims of crucifixion parallels, but he, er, doesn't have room to include *any*. And this is the rule, not the exception. Lundy,[22] Higgins, [23] Graves, Doane,[24] *etc.*, they all claim they have read or heard this or that, but none of them can site a single source document. Acharya seems generously inclined to believe them. I don't. I am not saying they were frauds or deceivers. Acharya suggests that these researchers may have read texts or examined ancient monuments that have since been destroyed by ecclesiastical censors. And she may be right. I certainly wouldn't put it past the Machiavellian ethics of the religious authorities. But did they get rid of all the evidence only after Doane, Graves, and the others had managed to see it? It is not that I distrust these old researchers. It's just that I cannot agree or disagree with their evaluation of evidence they do not share with me.

Again, please keep in mind that I agree with Acharya on the basics: the mythical life of Jesus Christ was derived from many long-standing myths, many or most of them derived ultimately from ancient astronomy. I just don't see convincing evidence for there
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having been crucifixion stories about Krishna or the Buddha. That is a disagreement between scholars. I am not trying to "debunk" her as

apologists for religious traditionalism try to debunk both of us. But what about Jesus?

As I read through *Suns of God*, the question occurred to me again and again: "Okay, you have demonstrated that there were plenty of crucifixion myths and crucified gods. But does that prove Jesus wasn't actually crucified, any more than it proves Spartacus wasn't?" Why couldn't a historical Jesus have been like Spartacus, or better, like Cleomenes, the radical king of Sparta? He was chased off his throne and out of his homeland for advocating land reform. He fomented unrest all over the Eastern Mediterranean until he died in Alexandria. Then they crucified his corpse. Women admirers of the slain king came to his cross to mourn (Plutarch tells us) and swore they beheld a snake crawl up to protect the face from desecration by vultures. Hence, they concluded, he was a son of the gods. I doubt there is any reason to declare Cleomenes a myth. He has the kind of historical rootage Jesus lacks, though we can see how he was already passing into a cloud of legend. Why not Jesus?

Acharya's answer is striking. She is discussing Sir James Frazer's fascinating theory that the gospel character Barabbas and Philo's character Carabas both reflect an otherwise suppressed late continuation of human sacrifice among Jews, and that all victims, functioning as surrogates in a sacred king sacrifice, were called Barabbas, "son of the father." Then she says, "It is probable that there was at least one 'Jesus Barabbas' sacrificed in this manner during the decades that the gospel Jesus was said to have lived" [p. 462]. "Even if there were a dozen or more 'historical Jesuses' who had been sacred king sacrifices, it is not *their* 'biography' being told in the gospel. The gospel tale represents a fictionalized, archetypical account of the ritual murder so commonly committed in the ancient world" [p. 463]. What this says to me is that the ostensible difference between the Bultmannian view (there was a historical Jesus, of whom we know virtually nothing, because he was lost in a haze of mythical glorification) and the thoroughgoing Christ-Myth hypothesis (there was no historical Jesus, only myths) is moot.

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The case would be exactly analogous to that of Merlin. There may have been a Celtic bard named Myrrdin, a version of whose whose name was attached to Merlin the Magician, but would it be meaningful to call

him “the historical Merlin”? Suppose I am watching the film *Excalibur* with my daughter, and we see Merlin summon up a supernatural fog, then change Uther’s visage and cause his horse to ride upon the cloudbank to the castle of Cornwall, and my daughter asks me if Merlin really existed. To quote a Unitarian minister of my acquaintance, I suppose I might answer my daughter, “If you want the long answer, yes. If you want the short answer, no.” If my daughter and I are watching *King of Kings* and we see Jesus walk on water and raise Lazarus from the dead and she asks me if there was a historical Jesus, I’d have to give her the same answer. I think that is the answer Acharya is giving us, and I agree with her.

> ***And at the last from inner Egypt came***
> ***The strange dark One to whom the fellahs bowed;***
> ***Silent and lean and cryptically proud[25]***

Reading her mighty tome *Christ in Egypt: The Horus-Jesus Connection*,[26] unfriendly critics may think to accuse the Acharya of committing the fallacious appeal to authority because she peppers her text with information ascribed to various scholars and includes their professional titles or academic posts. But she is not thereby trying to lend a weight to her thesis which it would not possess on its own. Rather, she is trying to help us place the specialists whose work she is discussing. I am no Egyptologist, so it helps me to know who I am listening to here and that it is never just some convenient crank.

This is no doubt the best book by this controversial author. Any and every fault, real or perceived, that one might have detected in *The Christ Conspiracy*[27] was already absent from *Suns of God*, and it
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is hard even to remember them while one is reading *Christ in Egypt*. Nonetheless, I do have a couple of minor criticisms. My main one is that, as in the case of the great Robert Eisenman, she seems to me to *over*-document her case, almost to the point that I fear I will lose track of the argument. But, like all good teachers (*Acharya* means 'teacher'), she periodically pauses to draw the threads together. And of course the danger is implied in the scope of the subject. She quotes a previous scholar concerning this occupational hazard: “Unhappily these demonstrations

cannot be made without a wearisome mass of detail" [Gerald Massey, *Ancient Egypt: Light of the World*, p. 218, cited p. 313].

The book is more extensive and encompassing than many dissertations I have read, containing over 900 sources and nearly 2,400 citations in several languages, including ancient Egyptian. The text abounds in long lost references, many of them altogether new to English rendering, including *de novo* translations of difficult passages in handwritten German. This is the kind of thing that gives me, as a researcher, a migraine as soon as I see them coming in the distance!

Besides random judgment calls re this or that proposed parallel or conclusion, my only continuing disagreement with the Acharya is on her model whereby a committee of creators sat down to formulate the Christian religion. (Of course, this is what Constantine and his bishops did in the fourth century, but that is much later and less fundamental than the scenario envisioned here.) Such a scenario is by no means impossible, but it seems unnecessary to me. I prefer the old Romantic idea of Hölderlin and the early form-critics of an anonymous and nebulous 'creative community.' It is hard to track down rumors, myths, or ascendant religious symbols to specific names. But this difference hardly matters. Acharya and I are in agreement on the thoroughly syncretic character of primitive Christianity, evolving from earlier mythemes and rituals, especially those of Egypt.

For Egyptian influence to have become integral to Israelite religion even from pre-biblical times is only natural given the fact
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that from 3000 BCE Egypt ruled Canaan. We are not talking about some far-fetched borrowing from an alien cultural sphere. The tale of Joseph and his brethren is already transparently a retelling of Osiris and Set. The New Testament Lazarus story is another (Mary and Martha playing Isis and Nephthys).[28] And so is the story of Jesus (Mary Magdalene and the others correspond to Isis and Nephthys). Jesus (in the 'Johannine Thunderbolt' passage, Matthew 11:27//Luke 10:21) sounds like he's quoting Akhenaten's *Hymn to the Sun*. Jesus sacramentally offers bread as his body, wine as his blood, just as Osiris offered his blood in the form of beer, his flesh as bread. Judas is Set, who betrays him. Mourning women seek for his body. The anointing in Bethany ("Leave her alone! She has

saved the ointment for my burial!") is a misplaced continuation of the women bringing the spices to the tomb, where they would raise Jesus with the stuff, as Isis raised Osiris. In fact, Jesus *Christ* makes more sense as Jesus 'the Resurrected One' than as 'Jesus the Davidic Scion.' In the ritual reenactments, three days separate the death and the resurrection. Jesus appears on earth briefly, then retires to the afterworld to become the judge of the living and the dead—just as Osiris does.

Osiris is doubly resurrected as his son Horus, too, and he, too, is eventually raised from the dead by Isis. He is pictured as spanning the dome of heaven, his arms stretched out in a cruciform pattern. As such, he seems to represent the common Platonic astronomical symbol of the sun's path crossing the earth's ecliptic. Likewise, the Acts of John remembers that the real cross of Jesus is not some piece of wood, as fools think, but rather the celestial 'Cross of Light.' Acharya S. ventures that "the creators of the Christ myth did not simply take an already formed story, scratch out the name Osiris or Horus, and replace it with Jesus" [p. 25]. But I am pretty much ready to go the whole way and suggest that Jesus is simply Osiris going under a new name, Jesus, 'Savior,' hitherto an epithet, but made into a name on Jewish soil. Are there allied mythemes (details, really) that look borrowed from the cults of Attis, Dionysus, *etc.*? Sure; remember we are talking about a heavily syncretistic context. Hadrian remarked

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on how Jewish and Christian leaders in Egypt mixed their worship with that of Sarapis (=Osiris).

Third, Eusebius and others already pegged the Theraputae (Essene-like Jewish monks in Egypt) as early Christians, even Philo (the Jewish Middle Platonist of Alexandria) as a Christian! Philo and various Egyptian Gnostic sects experimented with the philosophical demythologizing of myths such as the primordial Son of Man and the Logos. Philo equated the Son of Man, Firstborn of Creation, Word, heavenly High Priest, *etc.*, and considered the Israelite patriarchs, allegorically, as virgin-born incarnations of the Logos. All, I repeat, *all*, New Testament Christological titles are found verbatim in Philo. Coincidence? Gnostic texts are filled with classical Egyptian eschatology. Christian magic spells identified Jesus with Horus. It seems hard to deny that even Christians as 'late' as the

New Testament writers were directly dependent upon Jewish thinkers in Egypt, just like the Gnostic Christian writers after them. And if the common Christian believer saw no difference between Jesus and Horus in Egypt (or between Jesus and Attis in the Naassene Hymn), why on earth should we think they were innovators?

I find myself in full agreement with Acharya S/D.M. Murdock: "we assert that Christianity constitutes Gnosticism historicized and Judaized, likewise representing a synthesis of Egyptian, Jewish and Greek religion and mythology, among others [including Buddhism, via King Asoka's missionaries] from around the 'known world'" [p. 278]. "Christianity is largely the product of Egyptian religion being Judaized and historicized' [p. 482].

Doubting Tom[29]

Liberal religion journalist and New Testament scholar *Tom Harpur* (once a Professor of New Testament at the University of Toronto, thus no slouch) has at last converted to the newly reascendant Christ Myth theory. The present book, *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light*,[30] seems to be as much a report of his subjective reaction to the

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evidence as an exposition of the evidence itself. One occasionally gets the feeling that Harpur is offering his testimony, in the fashion of a revivalistic convert, as evidence for his belief. There is also perhaps a bit too much cataloguing of big names in support of the proposition that Jesus didn't exist. What did the trick for Tom Harpur was his very late in the day reading of three scholars who are as far off the chart for most New Testament scholars as a historical Jesus was for the apostle Paul: Godfrey Higgins, Gerald Massey,[31] and Alvin Boyd Kuhn[32] (though he also quite properly draws attention to the erudite Earl Doherty). As a result, it is the similarity between the Jesus story and a number of Osiris and Horus mythemes that proves the mythic nature of Jesus for Harpur. But he hardly stops there. Harpur argues that the gospel writers were not only recycling already ancient myth-matter, but that they had no intention of claiming what they set down was historical fact. It was only the fascistic Church Fathers of the third century who conspired to literalize the myth. Until then, he says, everyone (at least elites and initiates) understood the gospel

story, like all other ancient incarnation and redeemer myths, to be allegories for the divine spark in every human breast and the resultant possibilities of human transformation. What iron-fisted Catholicism did was to restrict this divine humanity to Jesus alone, as if he were an actual living, breathing concrete individual, a Superman possessing remarkable powers that the mundane Jimmy Olsens and Lois Lanes around him lacked. But do we have to wait for the third century for that? As Helmut Koester showed long ago, one can already see Jesus sucking the spiritual air out of the room in the Gospel of John, where only *he*, and no longer *you*, is the light of the world [John 8:12 vs. Matthew 5:14].

Harpur blames the Church for leaving Christians with a Christ they cannot hope to follow but are commanded to follow, then condemned for not following. Psalm 22 plus Catch 22. Oh that
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someone might break the chains of the spiritual proletariat and give them some manner of religious experience! If only they would get wise to the possibility made known through Egyptian parallels to the Bible, namely 'Christ in you,' a power source through which the believer can do all things!

But what a straw Christ this is! Can it have escaped Harpur that all our Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Fundamentalists, and Holy Rollers are already avidly pursuing spiritual rebirth and moral transformation, and that they are doing it because they believe the very Spirit of God is burning within them? I agree with Harpur that these dear souls are pathetically superstitious in their biblical literalism and their “butcher shop religion” (as Harry Emerson Fosdick once called it). But to depict them, with all orthodox Christians, as empty religious zombies is just absurd. I cannot see what difference it is supposed to make whether one believes the life-revolutionizing power entered one as of his born-again conversion experience or, *à la* Oprah and New Thought, it was always there but latent until one’s climactic realization that it *was* there. In fact, what the heck’s the difference? In the final analysis, one wonders whether Harpur’s gripe with these people is that they believe a bloody atonement was necessary to make their conversions possible. So what? Does our distaste for a particular doctrine matter *so much* that the rest of us have to set straight these “ignoramuses” (uh, like Karl Barth?)?

And if we could just reduce Christianity to the mystical core it supposedly shares with all other religions, there would be no more bloodshed, such as Christianity has caused, like a roaring lion, throughout its sorry history, seeking whom it may devour. Or would there be? I'm not sure the New Testament promotes pantheism as Harpur supposes, but I'm pretty certain the Bhagavad Gita does, and it makes a point of dashing and smashing pacifist sensitivities. Precisely because humans are vastly greater than their paltry flesh-bodies, it is no big deal to kill these latter on the battlefield. Like changing a suit of clothes, Arjuna, m'boy! And Harpur frets that Born-Again Christians staff the Pentagon! (Do they? Is there some survey where he's getting this?)

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Harpur rightly excoriates Church propagandists for their history of pious frauds, though in the same breath he admits there was no real standard of plagiarism or authorial ownership in the ancient world. And while he scorns the works of such lying churchocrats, he is pleased to admire the sainted Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who was such a crude hoaxer and confidence trickster that she actually had confederates drop folded paper notes through the air vents during séances and claimed they were messages from the Ascended Masters! Well, I guess Blavatsky can be forgiven because, unlike the Catholics, she's "*our* son of a bitch."

Harpur quite rightly (to my way of thinking) protests that we must not demythologize the gospels, as if that were to subtract the myths, but rather we ought to interpret them. Needless to say, that is exactly the *point* of demythologizing: to interpret, not to eliminate in the manner of 'scientific,' 'rationalist' liberal theology. Bultmann, Gogarten, and Tillich were not some sort of tin-eared Unitarians. But what does Harpur's allegory yield? He thinks Philo and Origen had the correct and original understanding. But Origen was much more like Catholic supernaturalists than Harpur wants to think. As I read him, Origen's allegorical method was mainly a hermeneutical license to kill every text that didn't fit into his version of Christian theology. The Old Testament was a ventriloquist dummy for the New. What we call Origen's 'allegory' was more often simply an allusive citation of scripture to invoke the language of this passage to exposit the teaching of that one. And as for Philo, he labors mountainously to bring forth the merest mouse: like his heirs, Swedenborg

and Charles Fillmore, Philo makes every passage mean, in the last analysis, the same thing. Every sentence of scripture is a redundant, alternative way of describing the faculty and role of reason and/or the rudiments of psychology and cosmology, ideas derived from philosophy and only being read back into the Bible. Albert Schweitzer complains about reductionistic gospel exegesis as a systematic attempt to defuse bombs and club baby seals.[33] I don't
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know if the gospels are so interesting if all they are about is telling me that because I have a spark of the divine I can be more optimistic, as if a 'divine pedigree' means I can do better on my diet today than I did yesterday. *Is that it?* When he is done, I suspect it is Tom Harpur who has effectively subtracted the myth and let the air out of the tire. For hallowed esotericism and the mysteries of the ages, it doesn't sound so profound to me.

Though eventually Harpur grants that the gospel mythemes descend only indirectly from Egyptian prototypes, through the channels of Greco-Roman Mystery cults and even the Old Testament, most of the time his citation of Egyptian stories and iconography, *à la* Massey, *et al*., implies a direct borrowing from Egypt, as when he suggests that "Matthew" may be derived from *Ma'at*, or that Herod takes the place of the Egyptian Herut—even though there actually were men named Herod. I am friendly to this position up to a point. It seems to me that much of the Jesus and Lazarus myths do reflect those of Osiris and Horus pretty directly. And the Eucharist, with its mystery of flesh-eating and blood-drinking, cannot have originated as a sectarian Jewish reinterpretation of Passover but simply must be derived from Osiris and Dionysus. The mourning of the women seeking Jesus' body surely comes from the same source as Isis and Nephthys (not to mention Cybele and Anat and Ishtar and Aphrodite). These points are enough to grant Harpur the game. But he appeals to many, many more bits of Egyptian myth and liturgy, and most of these do not strike me with anywhere near the force that they did Harpur.

For one thing, all the mythemes and I-sayings and promises of salvation are just too generic. If his point is to prove that little of the gospel soteriology and Christology is new or unique, fine. (And, of course, that is blasphemous enough to some ears.) But is there direct dependence

between this saying of Jesus and that one ascribed to Horus about being the path to salvation? Again, one wonders if these bare quotations of gospel-sounding stories, tips of
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icebergs as they are, are not misleading quoted out of context like this. (One keeps flipping over to the endnotes hoping for longer source passages, discussions by other scholars on the same point, something to substantiate the author's claims, but, as with many biblical commentaries, it is the juiciest parts on which no further light is shed.) It was the duty of Anubis to "make straight the paths to the upper realms of heaven" (not in quotes in the text, so how close *was* the original?), while John the Baptist (herald for Jesus as Anubis was for Horus) was to "prepare the way of the Lord" and to "make his paths straight." But is Harpur leaping to conclusions when he implies John was simply a renamed Anubis? Such a 'tit-for-Tut' approach makes nonsense of the gospel evidence that implies the herald position of John evolved as a product of propaganda between rival sects, as well as the fact that John's "making straight his paths" comes from an Isaiah passage (40:3) that meant something else in a different context. You can't just play connect-the-dots diachronically when there are so many synchronic connections crying out to be made.

Harpur's discussion contains many dubious fact claims. Is there really evidence that Christians torched the library of Alexandria? As I understand it, this cavil goes no further back than the Christianity-hating Edward Gibbon. Is Matthew the only gospel to declare (like one Egyptian source) that God numbers the very hairs of one's head? What about Luke 12:7? Did John really say that Jesus shares the very nature of the Father? If he had, that would have saved a lot of fourth-century travel expenses. Did Papias and Irenaeus believe Jesus died peacefully in bed as an old man? I think not. Irenaeus did believe Jesus was 50 when he was crucified, but that's a bit different. Was Celsus' *The True Logos* utterly destroyed by the Church, so that we can only wish to know what he said? Was there an alpha-privative in Hebrew, or in Egyptian hieroglyphics? I'm no linguist, but I'd be surprised. Nor do you really need to try to make "Abraham" come out to "a-Brahman" (as if a Hindu demigod) if you've already dispensed with the patriarch, *à la* Ignaz Goldziher, as a personification of the moon (which I think is correct)?

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Tom Harpur seems to me to commit the fallacy of hermeneutical ventriloquism, as if to say: the biblical writers were surely as smart as me. Now, if I decide the gospels, which are grossly legendary, make much better sense as allegories, then the gospel writers must have thought the same thing. (John Dominic Crossan, whom Harpur quotes in this connection, also takes this approach.) Harpur admits Luke started the insidious process of petrifying allegory into pseudo-history, but the other evangelists he seems to exempt, laying the blame on later churchmen, villains right out of Dostoyevski. But can you really get Mark off the hook when he seems to want to gull the reader into accepting the (new) empty tomb episode with the excuse that the women told no one about it? Sure, he was concocting fiction, and he knew it, but did he want *you* to know it?

To widen the angle a bit, this is another way of saying that, for Harpur, the vast majority of the biblical text (whether edifying or vexing) goes into the meat grinder to produce a synthetic potted spam called mysticism. “Once you understand that all the myths, legends, stories, ‘histories,’ allegories, parables, and symbols are a kaleidoscope of variations on this one central theme, the Bible comes alive in a wholly new way, I have found” [p. 181]. It’s like one of those metaphysical Bible dictionaries. Whatever you look up, from 'Hezekiah' to 'cubit,' it always says “a symbol for the divine force in the human heart.” For Harpur, as for his inspirations Higgins, Massey, and Kuhn, it all equals one thing: pantheism and the challenge of inner transformation. Well, I’m sorry, but there’s just no way you can make the Deuteronomistic History or the Priestly Code or the Davidic Succession Narrative or discussions of eating meat offered to idols boil down to that. It is just as spurious as when Orthodox Christianity tries to tell us that the Old Testament is somehow about the Christian gospel. Nonsense.

In all such cases, all the interpreter is doing is cashing in a closet full of stuff he doesn’t like for a handful of stuff he likes better. Consider Harpur’s grossly over-simplistic account of how the biblical books were produced: “From the beginning, they were preserved in memory only. They made up the body of what is known as the great
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oral tradition, a set of ritual formulas, ceremonial rites, allegorical depictions of truth, myths, number graphs [!], and pictorial symbols of the realities and the phenomena of human spiritual history that had been handed down from generation to generation in unwritten form. Only here and there, chiefly to avoid their being lost, forgotten, or too badly corrupted by change, they were set down in writing and so, at last, came to later ages as books, presumably 'written' or edited and revised by somebody" (*ibid*.). If this were true, one would never find, *e.g*., the vast and intricate patterns of redaction and theological embellishment one can trace from Samuel to Chronicles, from Mark to Luke, *etc*. It just wouldn't be there. The biblical books would be chaotic repositories of bits and pieces like the Upanishads or the Koran. But such textual intricacies have by no means vanished; Harpur simply has lost interest in them and so they have dropped beneath his notice. He is engaged in the strategy Derrida called "the dangerous supplement." He thinks he is adding on to an entity something to modify or finish it, when in reality he is supplanting it with some new, rival entity which he implausibly claims to be the same as the original.

It seems to me that Harpur is doing what all allegorists have always done, treating the ancient author as Eric Idle does Terry Jones in the old *Monty Python* skit, saying "Wink, wink, nudge, nudge, say no more, eh?" while Jones looks back at him in utter puzzlement.

Minimal Messiah[34]

One naturally approaches *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David[35]* with excited expectation that Thomas L. Thompson, the king of Old Testament minimalism, is going to give his customary treatment, this time, to the New Testament. Surely, one thinks, Thompson will dive into the debate over whether there is any evidence of synagogues in first-century Galilee, for example. One hopes for some substantial contribution to the Christ Myth debate.

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But one is disappointed. There is much to learn from Thomas's graceful and symphonic treatment of ancient Middle Eastern Sacred King protocols and related mythic-literary themes, and especially of the tragedy of the Israelite/Jewish monarchy recounted in the Deuteronomistic history (with

its anticipations in the Pentateuch and echoes in many other quarters of scripture), but finally there is as little anti-history in the book as there is history in the Bible.

In several previous, brilliant studies, Thompson has demonstrated, especially through archaeology, that the Old Testament is as devoid of any historical basis as the Book of Mormon is. That leaves him with a big and variegated book, or collection of books, that must have a rather different purpose and character than we had thought. Even Von Rad,[36] with his 'theology of recital,' presupposed a historical Israel and Judah whose national life and history provided at least some sort of building blocks for the fanciful epic of salvation history. The biblical bards were commemorating, celebrating, reliving events based, however loosely, on what their ancestors had undergone. We figured it was something like Homer's *Iliad,* based on a real Trojan War to some unknowable degree. But, failing even that amount of historical grounding, we are left to ask just what sort of literature *is* the Old Testament? Is it all really a parable about human potential and failure? Is its apocalyptic language really intended as timeless utopianism? Are its sacred kings and heroes really set forth as nothing more than character types to emulate or to eschew?

I suppose I am not ready to give up form-criticism and its attendant urge to reconstruct some *Sitz-im-Leben* for this psalm, that oracle, this etiology, *etc.* And that implies that much of the Bible can function as a core sample revealing at least hints of what was going on historically. I guess I had rather do something like posit a Maccabean setting for the Psalms than to make them simply abstract religious poems.

And then there is the uneasy implication of Thompson's work that tends not only to dehistoricize the Old Testament but to de-Judaize it as well, as if the second-remove abstract, figurative reading
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to which Gentile God-fearers and Christians perforce resorted were really the ancient authors' intention all along.

Thompson simply dismisses the notion that the messianic motifs in which the gospels are steeped reflect the apocalyptic expectations either of early Christians or of contemporary Jews. No, they all 'understood' the various prophecies and miracle stories of both Testaments as utopian fictions and allegories of piety. Thompson fairly sneers at the imagined

bumbling of Albert Schweitzer, foolish enough to try to discern the outlines of an eschatologically deluded Jesus from Matthew and Mark. How could anyone, before modern numbskulls, have so grossly misread the biblical, messianic tradition as to imagine that the Kingdom of God might actually dawn in fury and blessing? No, surely they knew better than literalist moderns. And then along comes Simon bar-Kochba! He seems to have taken it all too literally! But why should we assume the train jumped the track with the Son of the Star? Rabbi Akiba certainly shared his perspective, and presumably he was a fairly sharp-eyed student of scripture—as traditionally read. And if Bar-Kochba believed in a literal messianism, starring himself, why cannot a historical Jesus have seen himself in the same light a century before? Not that he did, but it is not clear why we ought to rule out the possibility.

The special pleading argument of the book is akin to that found in James D.G. Dunn's writings on New Testament Christology.[37] Having surveyed the thinking of Philo of Alexandria concerning a hypostatic Logos, Son of God, Heavenly High Priest, and Primal Adam, Dunn is curiously reticent to admit that Philo had created New Testament Christology in advance, with John and Paul simply scribbling the name *Jesus of Nazareth* in the blank. No, Dunn argues, Philo was not talking metaphysics but metaphor. It was the New Testament Christians who first envisioned a *real* heavenly Priest, Adam, *etc.* Dunn is trying to protect his inherited theology, a Christology of the genuine incarnation of a metaphysical being unknown till the Incarnation. Thompson, on the other hand, is just covering his hermeneutical hind end.

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I have referred to Thompson's expert tracing of themes through a thicket of scripture passages. We are to join him in seeing a verse in Job shedding light on another in Kings, *etc.*, on the basis of a theme or even a single word used in common. Pardon me, but when I get to this point in an exegetical argument, I start wondering just what sort of cleverness the scholar is demonstrating. Is he discerning the Ariadne thread sewn so carefully and so long ago for future readers? That is, is our scholar thinking the ancient writer's thoughts after him? Or is it rather that the scholar is manifesting the creative and synthetic skill of the midrashist, even the kabbalist, in atomistically splicing together texts hitherto

unaware of one another? Has Thompson unlocked the meaning of the text? Or has he used its straw to weave together the gold of yet another biblical theology?

And this observation leads to an irony. Thompson chides John Dominic Crossan and many other scholars for their supposed pretense of being able to tell that Matthew and Luke utilized Mark and Q. There is no need for such hypotheses, Thompson informs us, because the ocean of common motifs is much too wide and deep for us to spot a similarity between text A and text B and then to conclude that one got it from the other. He is accusing all adherents of any of the Synoptic hypotheses of the sin of "parallelomania." What strikes me as odd is that it seems to take much less proof than Crossan can point to in behalf of Synoptic dependence theories for Thompson to be sure that this obscure Psalm line is the basis for that story in 1 Samuel, or that Nehemiah has a particular passage of Genesis in mind.

In the end, I gather Thompson is saying, *à la* Bruno Bauer, that someone in the Hellenistic period saw the need for a fictive ego-ideal/personal savior and invented Jesus to play that role. Nor does such a theory seem unlikely to me. But I could wish for a good bit more than hints from Thompson, who has forgotten much more of the relevant data than I will ever learn. For instance, I need Thompson, if I am to understand his work, to explain how the propaganda mythemes of ancient sacred kings became isolated from any actual king or would-be king and became the basis of a complete fiction, whether of David or of Jesus.

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Sometimes Thompson provides clues he does not linger to put together, and I for one find myself left to my own devices, wondering if I am "getting it." For instance, it appears that the notion of Satan testing and trying the (ostensibly) righteous is one of these sacred king motifs, something that becomes evident once one discerns, with Thompson, that Job is pictured either as a pagan king or in kingly terms. Satan goes to work in order to determine whether King Job deserves the mandate of heaven. Well, that makes one think of Satan testing King David, whispering the suggestion that he might want to conduct a conscription census. Is he a good and godly king who will trust in the name of Yahweh rather than in horses and chariots? Then, come to think of it, Satan also

challenges the status of Joshua the high priest [Zechariah 3:1–5], the post-exilic replacement for the king, whose costume the priests had even appropriated. So far, so good. Jumping over to the New Testament, Jesus being tested in the wilderness by Satan makes new sense as part of the image of Jesus as a sacred king, not merely a saint. What about when, in Luke 22:31, Jesus tells Peter that Satan has demanded his prerogative to sift the Twelve like wheat? Does that break the pattern? No, because Jesus has just bequeathed a kingdom to his disciples [22:28–29], so they must attract Satan's attention, to see if they are worthy of sitting on the promised thrones! Fascinating! But maybe I am only doing what I half-accuse Thompson of doing: connecting far-flung dots.

There is, I say, much to be learned from this book, and yet in the end it mainly whets my appetite for an extended work of New Testament minimalism by this great scholar.

Atwill's Messiah[38]

The controversial thesis of Joseph Atwill in *Caesar's Messiah: The Roman Conspiracy to Invent Jesus[39]* is that Christianity began as the opium of the Jewish people, mixed and prescribed for them by the crafty Flavian dynasty. Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian had had
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their fill of militant Zealotry and Sicariism. They could not bend the Jewish nationalists to their will even after a destructive war that leveled the temple of their God. No amount of torture could make Jewish prisoners deny their faith and call Caesar not only their salad but their lord. And so Titus Caesar, with the help of his obedient lackey Josephus, devised a master deception whereby Jews should be seduced into worshipping Titus, divine son of the divine Vespasian, without knowing it, under the guise of a fictitious Jesus, divine son of a divine Father. The gospels were composed by Romans (and Roman stooges including defeated Zealot leader John of Gischala AKA John son of Zebedee) to catechize Jews into this new and false Judaism which, if they accepted it, should also lull them into a soporific pacifism convenient for Rome. The four canonical gospels and Josephus' *The Jewish War* were designed to be read together and so to reveal to the *cognoscenti* this secret origin and rationale for the Christian religion. Further, this Flavian Pentateuch, read

thus intertextually, should disclose a series of cruel jokes and parodies of the very faith it presented for the consumption of the masses who read it literally. The Flavian aristocrats themselves would have gotten the jokes, especially the rich jest that the fools who fell for their scam religion were worshipping Titus without knowing it. In a cover blurb, Robert Eisenman remarks, “If what Joseph Atwill is saying is only partially true, we are looking into the abyss.” And the abyss is looking back at us. But is it even partially true?

Eisenman’s interest in Atwill’s proposal is understandable. Eisenman, in his monumental work *James the Brother of Jesus*, was able to show, from an altogether new perspective, how thoroughly pro-Roman is New Testament faith. Compared with the religion of nationalistic Jewish Christianity, it must have seemed the foulest betrayal, an overnight devolution of the faith of a messiah who stormed the temple, condemning its Roman lapdog rulers, into a religion advocating obedience to Caesar, paying him his denarius, and accepting Quisling tax collectors as brothers in the faith. And Atwill is attempting to explain how such a Gentile Christianity, seemingly a perverse parody of Jewish messianism, could have come about. But does Eisenman accept Atwill’s theory? His blurb sounds

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like an exercise in damning with faint praise: he doesn’t even commit himself to Atwill’s being partly right.

I will return presently to a handful of oddities that Atwill rightly points out, providing tasty food for further thought. But first I want to provide a broad sketch of the sense I think Atwill’s theory would make of New Testament phenomena, which is not to say it is the only theory that might account for these features. Picture a religious ethic of conspicuous compromise with the occupying authorities, a gospel that tells its believers not to resist any who confiscate their property, but to pay Roman taxes and to carry a legionary’s field pack twice the distance stipulated by Roman law. Imagine a story that blames not just Jews but implicitly nationalistic, messianic Jews for the destruction of their temple. A story that has the messiah predict that the kingdom will be taken from Jews and given to a more worthy nation. Keep in mind how the preacher of this sect befriends Jews who collaborate with Rome and eulogizes a Roman centurion for

having faith unparalleled among Jews. He is declared innocent by Roman authorities but nonetheless is done in by Jewish rulers. Then think of how the predictions of the fall of Jerusalem a single generation later correspond so closely to Josephus' account of the events, and furthermore, how Josephus mentions Jesus as a righteous man and even as the messiah of prophetic prediction (though Josephus himself had proclaimed Vespasian the proper object of such prophecy). When someone suggests that Christianity may have been a 'safe,' denatured, Roman-domesticated, messianic methadone to replace the real and dangerous messianic heroin of the Zealots, and that Josephus had something to do with it, it does not sound unreasonable on the face of it.

Now even this much is highly debatable, and necessarily so. But if we find this much of the premise beguiling, should we go the rest of the way with Atwill as our guide? After all, somewhat similar theories of a Roman origin of Christianity and of Jesus have been proposed by Abelard Reuchlin (whose notorious 1979 booklet *The True Authorship of the New Testament*[40] strikingly anticipates
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Atwill's book at several points), Margaret Morris (*Jesus Augustus*), Cliff Carrington[41] (who also ascribes the gospels to the Flavians), and Stephan Hermann Huller (who makes Jesus the forerunner of Marcus Julius Agrippa).[42] We might find that one of these alternative theories of Roman origins explains many of the same things Atwill's does, and without the disadvantages. (But none of them really does a better job than Eisenman's.)

Atwill's theory does account for the persistent pro-Roman tendencies of the New Testament, but consider what else it requires us to swallow. First, we are to accept a common, if committee, authorship of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Josephus' *The Jewish War*. The whole idea seems, well, absurd. There is way, way, too much *else* in any and all of the gospel texts that cannot be dismissed (really, neglected) as mere padding, ballast, which is all it would be if Atwill were right. ("All of Jesus' ministry was about the coming war with Rome and was designed to establish Jesus as Titus' forerunner" p. 260.) Are we to dismiss the diverse, systematic, and subtle theological nuances disclosed by redaction

criticism? Are all the patterns disclosed by Conzelmann,[43] for instance, to be dismissed as optical illusions in order to justify Atwill?

Similarly, only the most obtuse reader, the most tin-eared, can possibly fail to appreciate the sublime quality of so much of the New Testament (agree or disagree with it), which is necessary to do if one is to dismiss the whole thing as an elaborate joke on the reader. Rather, the joke is on Atwill, whose great learning has apparently driven him mad. Just think of someone advancing the same theory about, say, the Buddhist scriptures. The worst of them are far too tedious and turgid to have been composed to fill out a hoax (who
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would have gone to the trouble?), while the more readable and winsome (like the *Dhammapada*) are filled with a wisdom beyond the reach of a worldly-minded scoffer. As to Jesus' teachings, Atwill declares that "those who see spiritual meaning in his words are being played for a fool" [p. 234]. Such a statement is only a damning self-condemnation, revealing the author's own absolute inability to appreciate what he is reading. This is why one must not throw one's pearls before swine.

Can we imagine that Josephus consciously intended his audience to meticulously compare his text with that of the gospels, and *vice-versa*, for either to make sense? Atwill grants the authenticity of the *Testimonium Flavianum*, which even apologists cannot seem to swallow without trimming away the most obviously Christian gristle. He thinks the only reason scholars have dismissed it as an interpolation is that they think it fails to fit into the context, which, however, it does, according to his esoteric reading.

Atwill claims he has learned to read the esoteric secrets of the gospels, whereby they are seen as black-comedic satires of events in the Jewish War. For instance, when Jesus offers his flesh for consumption at the Last Supper, it is really a wink to the reader who is somehow supposed to think of a passage in Josephus set during the Roman siege, when a woman eats the roasted flesh of her own infant. When Jesus offers to make his disciples fishers of men, the line is supposed to sardonically anticipate a wartime episode in which the Romans picked off fleeing Jewish rebels swimming in the Lake of Galilee. Thinking his method justified by comparison to the ancient practice of scriptural typology, Atwill gives

himself license to indulge in the most outrageous display of parallelomania ever seen. He connects widely separated dots and collects sets of incredibly far-fetched verbal correspondences, from gospel to gospel and between the gospels and Josephus, then uses them to create ostensible parallel accounts. Then he declares himself justified in borrowing names, themes, and intended references from one supposed parallel account and reading them into the other, thus supplying 'missing' features. Triumphantly, Atwill defies the reader to call it all
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coincidence, working out the math to show such correspondences could never be the product of chance. Well, of course they are not. They are the product of his own arbitrary gematria in the first place. “That the wicked man in the Fulvia story can be seen as a lampoon of Paul seems difficult to dispute” [p. 247], unless of course one forgot to pick up a pair of 3-D glasses on the way into the theatre.

Again, Atwill hammers home the alleged parallel between Josephus’ story of a Jewish matron, Paulina, tricked into sleeping with a deceiver, Decius Mundus, claiming to be Anubis incarnate, on the one hand, and that of the supposed deception of disguising Titus as the god Jesus, on the other. What do they have in common? Josephus says Decius came forward to gloat, revealing the hoax three days later, while the adjacent *Testimonium Flavianum* of Josephus says Jesus was seen alive again three days after his crucifixion. “There is, of course, a difference. Whereas Jesus appears *on the third day* to show that he is a God, Decius *appears on the third day* to announce that he is not a god. [But] It is implausible that something as unusual as two ‘third-day divinity declarations’ would wind up next to one another by chance.” [p. 245]. But there is no declaration of divinity in either case! As Atwill himself notes, Decius declares the opposite, while Josephus (or whoever wrote the *Testimonium* passage) says nothing of Jesus or anyone else declaring him divine as a result of the resurrection. Of such airy bricks is Atwill’s cloudy castle built.

What is the utility of reading the gospels together as pieces of a single puzzle? If each evangelist meant to send the baffled reader in search of other texts with which to harmonize the one he began reading, it might enable us to iron out the contradictions, say, of the Easter stories. First, as

per John 20, Mary Magdalene finds an empty tomb. But it is not that of Jesus. Rather she has mistakenly gone to the recently vacated tomb of Lazarus! She informs Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple that Jesus appears to be missing. These two, plus a third man, simply 'Peter,' make their way to the tomb. The Beloved Disciple arrives first but lingers for a moment outside the tomb, nearing the opening. Peter has not reached the tomb yet, but *Simon* Peter beats him there and walks past the Beloved Disciple,

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becoming the first to enter the sepulcher, where he spots the grave clothes cast aside when Lazarus left. At this specific junction, less than the duration of a minute, one must suppose, a second Mary Magdalene and her sisters (whose visit is recorded in Matthew 28) approach and see the Beloved Disciple outside the tomb. They think him an angel descended from heaven, and he tells them Jesus has risen. The women depart, and the Beloved Disciple joins Simon Peter inside, whereupon another party of women, including a third Mary Magdalene (this time from Luke 24), approaches to see the two men in the tomb. They take Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple for angels. They leave, and, moments later, so does Simon Peter. As soon as he vanishes, here comes a fourth Mary Magdalene, this one from Mark, and she spies the Beloved Disciple inside the tomb and thinks he is an angel. He tells her and her companions to relate the news to Peter (who has not yet arrived, remember, only the quite distinct *Simon* Peter!). The Beloved Disciple returns home, but soon the other (Lukan) Peter (not Simon Peter) approaches, having heard the report of the Lukan Magdalene. He has brought at least one other man with him, *à la* Luke 24:24. The John 20:12 Mary Magdalene sees these men inside the tomb and thinks they are angels. Then she turns and sees a mysterious figure standing outside the tomb, takes him for the gardener, and asks him about Jesus, then thinks he is Jesus. But in 'fact' he is Titus Caesar. The savvy reader (*i.e.*, Atwill) will get the joke: the 'Jesus' worshipped by stupid Christians is really Titus. It is all supposed to be a comedy of errors *à la* Plautus.

Atwill hypothesizes that the Flavian jokesters were compiling the gospels-plus-Josephus as a kind of intelligence test, and Atwill implicitly congratulates himself as the only one in history who has ever passed it. “I would note that the satirical system that unites the New Testament and

Wars of the Jews can be seen as an exercise in mind expansion, in that to solve the puzzles the reader must learn to think ‘outside the box,’ so to speak. The authors were making the point that the narrow focus the Sicarii Zealots maintained regarding a few scrolls was a limited and inaccurate mode of thought. The authors seem to be suggesting that only by seeing all sides of a problem can the truth be known. Therefore it is possible that they

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designed the New Testament as a tool to intellectually uplift the messianic rebels” [p. 225]. No it isn’t. “It is possible that the authors of the Gospels created them as a sort of educational tool disguised as a narrative about Jesus. The authors may have wished their readers to work through the various contradictions in logic in order to develop their reasoning ability and thus be able to think their way out of religious superstition. They may have wished the Gospels to be seen by posterity as their contribution to the development of reason” [p. 167]. Or maybe as a big Jumble puzzle. “The point I think the creators of Christianity were making with their use of comedy is that there are unlimited ways to interpret scripture and it is easy for the uneducated to see symbolic meaning where there is none. They made this point by creating the New Testament as an example” [p. 234]. No, it is Atwill himself whose creation demonstrates the limitless possibilities of perverse and gratuitous interpretations of the text.

One hates to be so severe in the analysis of the work of an innovative thinker who gives us the gift of a fresh reading of familiar texts, but in the present case it is hard to euphemize. The reading given here is just ludicrous. There are indeed surprising parallels between Josephus and the gospels that traditional exegesis has never been able to deal with adequately, but surely the more natural theory is the old one, that the gospel writers wrote late enough to have borrowed from Josephus and did so. Thus Matthew 23:35 probably confuses the biblical prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah with the revolutionary martyr Zechariah son of Baruch whose death Josephus relates. But is this because Josephus and his committee of comedy writers are responsible for both references, meaning for us to read them in tandem, as Atwill avers? Or is it because Mathew read the information in Josephus and mixed it up (as Luke did Josephus’ references to Theudas the Magician and Judas the Galilean in Acts 5:36–37)?

Atwill reasons that Jesus' prediction of the fall of Jerusalem plainly prefigures Josephus' account of the actual events, and he infers that both versions (in the future and the past tenses) stem from the same source, Josephus and his Flavian collaborators.

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Then, he reasons, the Son of Man whose coming was to climax the apocalyptic scenario must be none other than the actual man who did wreak judgment on Jerusalem, Titus. Atwill congratulates the Preterist school of interpreters (like J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*)[44] on recognizing that the Synoptic predictions of the desolation of Jerusalem must have been completely fulfilled in 70 CE, with nothing left over for futurist expectation. Here is one of Atwill's most attractive suggestions, though he does not put it the way I am about to do. I believe that Bultmann was right that several son-of-man sayings in the gospels referred originally simply to mankind in general (*e.g.*, Mark 2:10, 28; Matt. 12:32). In fact, I wonder if they do not retain this non-Christological Everyman denotation even in the gospels. Further, I suspect even more of the son of man sayings are intended this way, *e.g.*, Mark 14:21. Perhaps Mark 13:36 ("And then they will see the son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.") is another one. If it were, then maybe what we read there *is* a reference to Josephus' account of the end of Jerusalem, heralded, he says, by people beholding in the flame-tinged clouds the forms of battling soldiers and charioteers. After all, the introductory (redactional) question placed in the disciples' mouths concerns the time of the temple's destruction.

Again, echoing an already widespread theory, Atwill suggests that Mark's story of Joseph of Arimathea requesting the body of Jesus be taken down and given to him comes from Josephus' own experience of recognizing three crucifixion victims as former associates of his and securing Roman permission to have them taken down alive and treated, though only one survived [*Life* 75]. How similar are the names 'Joseph of Arimathea' and 'Joseph b*ar-Matthias*' (the historian's full name)! If the gospel story is based on Josephus' story, that would solve the problem of why Joseph seems to have asked only for Jesus, and what happened to the two other 'thieves' crucified alongside him. But to posit such a thing, one

hardly need envision a committee writing both stories in the hope that the [begin p. 89]

clever reader would connect them (as if doing so would remotely imply some identity between Jesus and Titus Caesar!).

Unaware of the work of Theodore J. Weeden,[45] Atwill traces out the numerous striking parallels between the Passion story of Jesus Christ and the Josephus story of Jesus ben-Ananias, his interrogation by the Sanhedrin and the Roman procurator, his predictions of Jerusalem's destruction, and his flogging and eventual death, suggesting the two Jesuses are one and the same. (It is too bad the rest of Atwill's parallels are not similarly compelling, even plausible.) But surely, as Weeden argues, the explanation is that Mark simply borrowed the story from Josephus.

What about the Roman-tilting anti-Judaism (maybe anti-Semitism) of the gospels? Again, the old explanations are quite natural and adequate: we are reading the documents of Gentile Christianity which viewed itself as superseding Judaism and Jewish Christianity. Why do their authors seem to kiss the Roman posterior? For apologetical reasons, to avoid persecution. Brandon, Eisler, and others saw that long ago. One need hardly posit that the gospels are cynical Roman (not merely pro-Roman) propaganda *à la* Reuchlin and Atwill.

According to Atwill, "the reader needs to comprehend perhaps the most complex literary satire ever written" [p. 169]. But Atwill's envisioned satire seems so complex as to be incoherent. "Jesus" stands not only for Tiberius but also for a hypothetical Zealot leader named Eleazar, who also appears in the New Testament as Lazarus. Mary Magdalene stands for several different women, 'Mary' being, Atwill guesses, a term for any female Jewish rebel or sympathizer. Simon Peter and Peter are not the same, either. The two gospel genealogies, *à la* Rudolf Steiner,[46] represent two distinct Jesuses. In Atwill's hands, everything means everything else. And, in the end, you know what that means.

[1] Originally published in *Free Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Summer 1999.

[2] Arthur Drews, *The Christ Myth*. Trans. C. DeLisle Burns. Westminster College – Oxford Classics in the Study of Religion, 3rd ed. [Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998]; Drews, *The Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus*. Trans. Joseph McCabe [Chicago: Open Court, n.d.].

[3] Bruno Bauer, *Christ and the Caesars: The Origin of Christianity from Romanized Greek Culture*. Trans. Frank E. Schacht [Charleston:: Charleston House, 1998].

[4] John M. Robertson, *Pagan Christs: Studies in Comparative Hierology* 2nd ed., [London: Watts, 1911]; Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology* 2nd ed., [London: Watts, 1910].
[5] William Benjamin Smith, *Ecce Deus: Studies of Primitive Christianity* [London: Watts, 1912]; Smith, *The Birth of the Gospel: A Study of the Origin and Purport of the Primitive Allegory of the Jesus* [NY: Philosophical Library, 1957].
[6] Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, p. 13.
[7] Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*. Trans. Paula Wissing [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998: 17–18]. "These legendary worlds were accepted as true in the sense that they were not doubted, but they were not accepted the way everyday reality is… Mythological space and time were secretly different from our own… The heroic generations are found on the other side of this temporal horizon in another world."
[8] G.A. Wells, *The Jesus Legend*. [Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1996].
[9] G.A. Wells, *The Jesus Myth*. [Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1999].
[10] Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man: The Case for a Mythical Jesus* [Ottowa: Age of Reason Publications, 2009].
[11] Earl Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ?* [Ottowa: Canadian Humanist Publications, 1999].
[12] Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* [San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012].
[13] Acts 20:35 may look like an exception to the rule of Acts leaving Jesus' teaching where it belongs, back in the Gospel of Luke, but notice that Paul is not made to quote any saying that appears in Luke. One suspects the author made up the saying for the specific scene in Acts.
[14] And plenty have! See Phillip H. Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters from the New Testament to Today* [NY: Oxford University Press, 1997]; G. Scott Sparrow, *Sacred Encounters with Jesus* [Allen, TX: Thomas More Publishing, 2002].
[15] George Harrison, "Here Comes the Sun." Beatles, *Abbey Road* [Hollywood: Capitol Records, 1969]. Originally published as *Suns of God* in *Journal of Higher Criticism JHC* 12/2, fall 2006; *Christ in Egypt* on Amazon.com.
[16] Acharya S., *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha, and Christ Unveiled*. [Kempton, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 2004].
[17] Ignaz Goldziher, *Mythology among the Hebrews and Its Historical Development*. Trans. Russell Martineau [NY: Cooper Square Publishers, 1967].
[18] Randel Helms, *Gospel Fictions* [Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1988].
[19] Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987: 39].
[20] Max Müller, "On False Analogies in Comparative Theology," in Jon R. Stone (ed.), *The Essential Max Müller: On Language, Mythology, and Religion* [NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002: 91–108].
[21] Kersey Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors, or Christianity Before Christ* [New Hyde Park: University Books, 1971].
[22] John P. Lundy, *Monumental Christianity, Or, the Art and Symbolism of the Primitive Church as Witnesses and Teachers of the One Catholic Faith and Practice* [NY: J.W. Bouton, 1876].
[23] Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis: An Attempt to Draw Aside the Veil of the Saitic Isis, or an Inquiry into the Origin of Languages, Nations and Religions* [NY: J.W. Bouton, 1878].
[24] Thomas William Doane, *Bible Myths and their Parallels in Other Religions, Being a Comparison of the Old and New Testament Myths and Miracles with those of Heathen Nations, Considering also their Origin and Meaning* [NY: Charles P. Somerby, 1882].
[25] H.P. Lovecraft, "Nyarlathotep," *Fungi from Yuggoth*, sonnet XXI.
[26] D.M. Murdock (Acharya S.), *Christ in Egypt: The Horus-Jesus Connection* [Seattle: Stellar House Publishing, 2006].
[27] Acharya S., *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold* [Kempton, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1999].
[28] Helms, *Gospel Fictions*, pp. 96–100.
[29] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism* 12/1 (Spring, 2006).
[30] Tom Harpur, *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light* [NY: Walker & Company, 2004].
[31] Gerald Massey, *The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Christ: Natural Genesis and Typology of Equinoctial Christolatry* [Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2012].
[32] Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *Who Is this King of Glory? A Critical Study of the Christos-Messiah Tradition* [Elizabeth, NJ: Academy Press, 1944].
[33] Schweitzer, pp. 196–197; or see the slightly more colorful version in the earlier English version Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*. Trans. W. Montgomery [NY: MacMillan, 1968: 232]. (This is the only reference I make to this edition.) Also, see p. 480 of the complete edition.
[34]*Journal of Higher Criticism* 11/1 (Spring, 2005).
[35] Thomas L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* [NY: Basic Books, 2005].
[36] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Volume 1: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*. Trans. D.M.G. Stalker [NY: Harper & Row, 1962].
[37] James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980: 226].
[38] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism* 11/1 (Spring, 2005).
[39] Joseph Atwill, *Caesar's Messiah: The Roman Conspiracy to Invent Jesus* [Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 2005].
[40] Abelard Reuchlin, *The True Authorship of the New Testament* [Abelard Reuchlin Foundation, 1986].
[41] Cliff Carrington, "The Peregrinations of Paul" *Journal of Higher Criticism* [7/2, Fall 2000: 233–241].
[42] Stephan Huller, *The Real Messiah: The Throne of St. Mark and the True Origins of Christianity* [London: Watkins, 2011].
[43] Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of Saint Luke*. Trans. Geoffrey Buswell [NY: Harper & Row, 1961].

[44] J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* [T. Fisher Unwin, 1887; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. 1983].
[45] Theodore J. Weeden, *The Two Jesuses*. Foundations and Facets Forum [New Series 6, 2, Fall 2003].
[46] Bernard Nesfield-Cookson, *The Mystery of the Two Jesus Children and the Descent of the Spirit of the Sun* (Forest Row: Temple Lodge, 2005).

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Chapter Three:

Catholic Jesus

The chief role of Jesus Christ for Christianity, especially the Roman Catholic Church, is not so much to save the human race through his atoning death (certainly no theologian has ever been able to explain how that might have worked), but rather to serve as a figurehead, even a corporate mascot, for the institution, not dissimilar to Ronald MacDonald. Roman Catholics once opposed the Higher Criticism of scripture for fear that it might (must) erode the foundations of their house of authority. But then they realized they were not biblicists like the Protestants and did not have to leave everything hanging from a single thread, namely the Bible. They could allow critical access to scripture after all, taking refuge in ecclesiastical tradition and the teaching authority of the Pope and the Magisterium. We can see the result in the work of Roman Catholic scholars like the great Raymond E. Brown. He was both near-omniscient in his erudition and keen in his critical insight.[1] He could be very fair with the text because he upheld what looks to me much like a 'double truth' epistemology. On the one hand, he was free to admit what one could and could not support by appeals to historical evidence. On the other, he figured all historical probabilities were trumped by Catholic dogma. For instance, Father Brown concluded that, while one could judge the historical resurrection the most likely reading of the evidence, the virginal conception could not be rendered historically probable.[2] But in any case, he believed in both on the authority of dogma. Fair enough. What he didn't do was to slant the evidence to make the Catholic belief seem to be vindicated by the historical data.

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I am about to discuss the views of some Roman Catholic scholars who, it seems to me, are not capable of separating the issues as clearly as Raymond Brown. Others pretend to be wearing the critic's hat when really

they are sporting the believer's headgear, or in the case of our first author, the papal mitre.

Pope Jesus[3]

Josef Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, has authored a two-part work on the historical Jesus. Here I will restrict myself to the second volume, *Jesus of Nazareth. Part Two, Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*.[4] No doubt the author's ecclesiastical rank is included in order to prevent confusion with John Ratzenberger, who portrayed Cliff Clavin on the sitcom *Cheers*. Or maybe not. But, to be fair, the author certainly does not rest on official clout to make the book seem more weighty. Ratzinger is certainly a learned man. And yet I cannot judge this book a significant work of scholarship. The reason for this is that the author's conception of what constitutes New Testament scholarship is antipodal to genuine criticism. The biblical critic begins from the standpoint of *not* knowing and wanting to find out. The Pope, not surprisingly, begins with prefab certainty and wants to defend it.

I am eager to experiment with the text, to try new paradigms and heuristic devices, to see what does and doesn't fit. Basically, I want to penetrate to the almost-lost secrets of the Jesus figure and of that religion that claims him as its patron. Ratzinger, by contrast, is the custodian of a gigantic and ancient religious institution, and his job, when it comes to scripture, is to defend a particular party line concerning who Jesus thought he was and what he sought to achieve, what happened to him, and how the Church came to be. The Pope must show that what the text says happened not only *did* happen but *must*, by divine fiat, have happened. It is not that difficult a task given that the New Testament is not some random collection of the earliest

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remaining Christian writings, much less in their pristine, unedited form. No, what we are reading as scripture today is a particular edition of chosen writings harmonized and in some cases rewritten to supply just the sort of official origin myth which the Church uses to justify itself and its prerogatives.

By contrast, the Higher Criticism, which I and an ever-shrinking cadre of scholars espouse, recognizes ancient clues that things were once

much different in the early Christian movement (not to mention in the ostensible life of Jesus). We are trying to strip off the masking tape even while apparatchiks like Ratzinger are busy reinforcing it. We are carefully chipping away the theological mortar holding the edifice together, while Ratzinger, in the present book, is, like old Nehemiah, readying his trowel to rebuild the walls of the Camp of the Saints.

The exegesis of the Roman bishop is everywhere harmonistic. For instance, as Hermann Samuel Reimarus[5] saw as long ago as the eighteenth century, the failure of the Parousia (Jesus' predicted second coming) was enough by itself to send the Cathedral of Christianity toppling to the ground. If Jesus, so to speak, placed all his chips on one claim that could be tested, the end of the world, and nothing happened, why believe anything else he pretended to know from revelation? And if he didn't actually say it, why believe he actually said anything else the gospels report either? Well, Ratzinger admits that a casual glance at a verse like Matthew 24:29–31

> Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

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might leave the reader with the distinct impression that the Parousia would arrive on the very heels of the fall of Jerusalem in CE 70, which of course did not happen. But, he says, that would be a hasty judgment, for do not passages like Mark 13:10 ("And the gospel must first be preached to all nations."), Matthew 24:14 ("And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come."). and Luke 21:23b–24 ("For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon this people; they will fall by the edge of

the sword, and be led captive among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled") make provision for a longish but indeterminate period of world-evangelization between Jerusalem's doom and the Parousia? Just keep taking your meds, pontiff. That's just what they *wanted* you to think.

Don't you see what is going on here? It was the failure of the Parousia to arrive that caused scribes to introduce these verses into the apocalyptic sections of the gospels. We are meant to read these predictions of 'the times of the Gentiles' and just forget all about that original verse that gave us a theological migraine. Take these Excedrin verses instead. You'll feel peachy in the morning.

Again, Ratzinger obligingly accepts the gospels having Jesus predict the destruction of the temple. He weaves from various textual bits a theological fabric in which Jesus must have viewed his death and the institution of Holy Communion as the natural evolution of sacrifice, so central to Israelite religion, into something better: the replacement of the temple with Christian sacraments and worship. Paul, he says, had already set forth the rudiments of this system of theology a good twenty years before the temple's destruction. But then again, Stephen had seen it even before that. Critical scholars,[6] by contrast, see another reading of these texts as far more natural: such theologies, which posit something else superceding the destroyed temple (whether, for Christians, the sacrifice of Christ or, for Jews, the efficacy of fasting and philanthropy for expiating sins) as attempts, *after the fact*, to make virtue of necessity. They fit better [begin p. 95]

historically *after* the events they seem to predict. They represent interpretation of past events, reflection on loss. But Ratzinger, like the New Testament writers and redactors, is content to read the theology as if it were history. He is writing from faith to faith.

Our haloed author seeks everywhere to fill in the socio-historical background of the gospel story, mining Josephus and other sources, as is customary in books like this. Surely there can be nothing to criticize here? Of course not—unless one has begun to suspect that the gospels are presenting us not with history but with a historicized myth, that is, a myth having become a legend. Myths deal with gods and heavenly bodies as characters in a story and belong in the same general neighborhood as fairy

tales and fables. When they become legends, it means the characters have been refashioned as men and women among mortals. Still extraordinary, but humanoids, demigods or theophanies. For example, both Hercules and Samson began as sun gods, narrative personifications of the sun. But by the time we read of their heroic exploits they have been placed, albeit vaguely, in past history, ostensibly in the same world we live in. Hercules and Samson meet us now as semi-divine or God-possessed heroes bearing swords, arrows, and steely thews. But their feats are not possible for real human beings. So they are legends, not history. When story tellers make a myth over into a legend, they must fill in the historical background. The Hydra may be on stage, but so are kings and armies.

Some biblical critics have long suspected that Jesus began as a myth (specifically even perhaps another sun myth like Enoch, Elijah, Esau, and Moses) and became a legend. The attempts to make him fit into earthly history were not always consistent, some ancient writers placing his death in Tiberius' reign, others in Claudius'. Who condemned him to death? Originally it was the mythic archons, the planetary guardians. Legend-mongers had to nominate political figures for the deed. Some said Herod Antipas, others Pontius Pilate. Did the Sanhedrin vote him a death sentence? On Passover Eve? Not likely. Could Pilate have declared him innocent but judicially murdered him anyway, fearing an impotent street mob whose
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permission he seemed to imagine he needed to release Jesus? It doesn't make much sense. The links to secular history are all square pegs that the gospel writers have jammed into round holes. It remains for spin doctors like our author to make the best of it and to assure their readers all is well. They can go back to sleep, to the dogmatic slumber from which Kant sought to awaken us with his clarion call: "Dare to know!" Too bad no echo of that sentiment resounds in the pages of Pope Ratzinger's Jesus book.

Why did early Christians want to historicize their Jesus in the first place? I believe Arthur Drews[7] answered that question quite effectively many decades ago. The emerging Catholic Church of the early second century was locked in a bitter struggle with Gnostics, Marcionites, and others who prized their own new revelations, which they claimed to have

from the heavenly god Jesus. Naturally, such fanaticism results in uncontrollable diversity of opinion, heresies multiplying by continuous mutation. No one could prove they had the real hot-line to heaven. Any dream or revelation might well be a hallucination. But if one could point to a historical founder and appeal to a definitive canon of his teachings to legitimate one's own, then one could claim copyright. That is why Jesus was seized from the sky and brought down into a picture frame on the wall of the Church: *Our Founder*. And thus it is entirely natural to read a safe account of the church-founding, theology-framing Churchly Jesus by none other than the man who claims to be his infallible vicar on earth. Scholars need not waste their time with this book, essentially a devotional commentary masquerading as a work of historical research.

The Real McCoy[8]

Luke Timothy Johnson, in *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, occasionally seems to be attempting to debunk the research of the Jesus Seminar and to substitute for it a different set of more
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conservative and more balanced critical conclusions. The "Real Jesus" of the title would then seem to be a 'more realistic' Jesus, one based on a methodologically superior historical study. But this turns out not in fact to be the thrust of Johnson's treatise. His criticisms of radical New Testament critics like Burton Mack and the Jesus Seminar (of which I am proud to be a Fellow and in whose deliberations I am privileged to have participated) are finally beside the point.

Johnson, who as far as I know has never attended any meeting of the Jesus Seminar, gives an altogether false impression that the Seminar uses some far-fetched and idiosyncratic methodology that respectable scholars would not deign to touch with a ten-foot pole. (Incredibly, Johnson actually supplies a list of elite universities and divinity schools whose highly paid scholars are the only ones he considers legitimate.) The fact of the matter is that most of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar are far less skeptical, less methodologically rigorous, than Rudolf Bultmann and the critics of the previous generation. Their methods and assumptions differ little from those Johnson and his allies use. Nor are the results

attained by the Jesus Seminar anything particularly new, as anyone familiar with the last few decades of biblical scholarship will be aware. The only thing new about the Jesus Seminar is that it has made a point of going public with the commonplaces of professional biblical scholarship.

Traditionally, ministers learn at least a smattering of these matters in seminary, but they are careful to keep mum in the pulpit lest they arouse the ire of the pious. One suspects that the Jesus Seminar's decision to go public (caricatured by Johnson and his allies as crass publicity-hunger) has put people like Johnson in an uncomfortable position. Those to whom he and his colleagues are accountable never quite understood what was going on in the scholarly guild, and now that the Jesus Seminar has blabbed it, Johnson, Richard Hays, Raymond Brown, and a number of others suddenly find themselves in the role of Peter, denying their former comrades as many times as they can before the cock crows.

Despite his tirades against New Testament critics who treat the New Testament narratives as fiction, Johnson's own contribution

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to scholarship, his published dissertation *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke–Acts*,[9] is a brilliant piece of the very sort of literary analysis he fulminates against in *The Real Jesus*. If he can make sense of the author's intention in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts that he does in the earlier book, then Luke and Acts just cannot be historically accurate. What happened? Did Johnson get knocked off his moped on the road to Damascus?

All Johnson's work since then has been what James Barr[10] calls "maximally conservative." In his *The Writings of the New Testament*,[11] for instance, he argues for the authentic Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) and that the Epistle of James is the work of James of Jerusalem. It is clear that he longs for the pre-critical paradise of traditional beliefs about authorship and accuracy. What happened to change Johnson's scholarly judgment from radical to conservative? Nothing really. And here is where we discover how his criticism of the supposedly unsound methods of modern biblical criticism is just a blind, a smokescreen. Eventually Johnson admits that historical research cannot yield a definite portrait of the historical Jesus. That way lies agnosticism.

But then, as it often has a strange tendency to do among religious writers, agnosticism magically transforms itself into fideism, a leap of faith. Instead of trying to build a plausible historical Jesus construct out of elusive and shadowy evidence, Johnson counsels the reader, we ought to be satisfied with the Christ of faith, the Son-of-God character of the Gospels and of Roman Catholic dogma. This is what he means by "the real Jesus"—the one the institutional Church thinks it owns the copyright on.

In short, Johnson can offer no better theory of the historical Jesus than that of Burton Mack or Robert Funk or John Dominic Crossan. No, he wants something else entirely, the traditional stained-glass savior
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of Christian dogma. It is for him finally a matter of historic faith, not of historical fact. Of course he feels sure the facts, could they be recovered, would fit the theological Christ, the *real Jesus*. But how does he know? By faith!

And this admission sheds some light on all those neo-conservative traditionalist positions Johnson takes in this book and in his other recent publications. It would seem that he has opted, as a matter of theology, for the traditional, authorized version of Christian origins, and so he allows himself in every case to be escorted to amenable conclusions, not by the data but by simple consistency with his traditionalist preferences. It is not so much a matter of scholarly opinion as it is company policy. He has abandoned the task of historical scholarship to serve as an ecclesiastical spin doctor. Perhaps it is relevant that, like the Grand Inquisitor whose agenda he has adopted, Luke Timothy Johnson is a Dominican monk. He has an institution and a party line to defend. Let him defend it. But let the result not be confused with historical inquiry.

Bare Ruined Gospels[12]

As is by now to be expected, conservative books on Jesus sooner or later take the obligatory swipe at the Jesus Seminar. Roman Catholic Gary Wills is no exception. Early in *What Jesus Meant[13]* he aims this pot shot:

> This is the new fundamentalism. It believes in the literal sense of the Bible – it just reduces the Bible to what it can take as

> literal quotation from Jesus. Though some people have called the Jesus Seminarists radical, they are actually very conservative. They tame the real radical, Jesus, cutting him down to their own size. Robert Funk called Jesus "the first Jewish stand-up comic." (p. xxv)

For one thing, Wills quotes Funk as the voice of the Seminar when in fact that particular proposal, to style Jesus a stand-up comic, was voted down by the Fellows. Apart from that, let me be

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candid and admit an element of truth in what Wills says: sometimes the Seminar's discussions of how to reshape church life and liturgy in light of their resultant Jesus do strike me as an effort to reinvent Unitarianism. For all the Westar Institute's sensitivity to the arts, I think they sometimes miss the music of the larger gospel tradition. But then that is not the primary point of the Jesus Seminar. The principle task is one of historical reconstruction. And that is really Wills's gripe. Like his co-religionist, Luke Timothy Johnson, Wills thinks nobody has any business trying to reconstruct the historical Jesus. For him, the whole endeavor is ill-advised because foredoomed.

"Trying to find a construct, 'the historical Jesus' … is a mixing of categories, or rather of wholly different worlds of discourse. The only Jesus we have is the Jesus of faith" [p. *xxvi*]. "So this book… will treat the Jesus of faith, since there is no other. The 'historical Jesus' does not exist for us" [p. *xxviii*]. What is the problem? Again like Johnson, Wills does not deny that there may in fact have been a Jesus who would not match the Jesus of faith in all particulars. He just thinks such a figure is unavailable to us (I agree). And in any case, Wills thinks, a historical Jesus would not be nearly as impressive as the canonical Jesus of the creeds, which is the one he likes. Thus the title of this book is a trick. "What Jesus Meant" might seem to suggest an exposition of Jesus' own message, but properly, given Wills' initial caveats, it ought to denote: "the Significance of Jesus." That is fair, though in that case his disdainful words about the work of the Jesus Seminar seem not only spiteful but altogether beside the point. It is like an artist hissing at a draftsman. A fashion designer jeering at a physiologist.

Unlike Evangelical apologists of the N.T. Wright/Ben Witherington ilk, Wills does not even deny that the historical Jesus has been irreparably

obscured by legend. Though he damns the Jesus Seminar for daring to say the gospels have been ‘embellished,’ a word he sneers at, Wills admits that Jesus is lost in the bonfire of the legends as soon as we see him. That blaze is the first thing we see of him, as is equally true of the Baal Shem Tov and Saint Francis of Assisi. But, Wills judges, those legends are all ‘true.’ They have
[begin p. 101]
the ‘meaning’ of Jesus right. (Or at least we have to suppose they do, since Wills repudiates in principle any criterion by which to measure any distance between the real thing and the interpretations of it.) I believe Wills has made the mistake Nietzsche warned against when he said that the lack of truth does not entitle us to label our fictions ‘true,’ which we might want to do since they’re all we have left. No, if we do that, we will soon forget and start mistaking our fictions for genuine fact. And that is exactly what Wills does throughout this book.

No sooner does he disavow any aim of scholarly historiography in favor of writing “a devotional book” than he begins a book-length string of historical inference and reconstruction. He has jumped at once from one of his discourse worlds into another. For instance, Wills psychoanalyzes Jesus:

> The frequently emphasized hostility he experienced from his own family helps us understand the shocking ease with which Jesus could later say, “If one coming to me does not hate his father and his mother [*etc.*] he cannot be my follower” (Luke 14.26). For members of his own family such an attitude was itself hateful. They could not see why he put on airs, went a different way, learned things beyond them, spent time on Hebrew texts that only scholars could deal with, neglecting (no doubt) the family business of cabinetmaking [p. 6]

Does Wills not realize that he is drawing historical and psychological inferences about characters who are mentioned in the text only in passing? He is speculating on the probabilities of what really happened behind the text, for the text reports none of these attitudes, motives, injured feelings, much less whether Jesus studied Hebrew or

ducked his duties in the shop. Wills's ostensible view of the faith-Jesus and the nature of the gospels should not allow him such indulgences.

Wills warns us that Jesus, as a divine being with all the arbitrariness of Jehovah thundering from Sinai or belittling Job out of the cyclone, cannot be taken as our example. He ridicules Al Gore's
[begin p. 102]
favorite slogan, "What would Jesus do?" because we, as mere mortals, have no business doing the things he did. For example: "Christian leaders have often rebuked the rebelliousness of young people by offering them a pastel picture of the young Jesus as a model of compliance and good behavior" [p. 7]. By contrast, Wills says that in Luke 2:48 Jesus treats his parents with the aloof arbitrariness of a God who owes nothing to his creatures [p. xv]. And yet in no time Wills is explaining Jesus simply as a different sort of not-uncommon child: "But there are many indications that Jesus was more like those restive and resisting children who have all the idealism and absolutism of youth – young people who chafe against the boundaries of the past and are panting to explore new horizons" [p. 8]. Are these kids gods, too? Wills doesn't seem to grasp his own point. Martin Kähler[14] was consistent where Wills is not. Kähler understood that the Son of God presented in the stained glass of the gospels is not the sort of entity one can psych out. It is ludicrous to try to trace out his psychological development, the influences upon him, what made him tick, *etc.* If one does that, one is stepping away from the Jesus of faith (what Kähler called "the historic, biblical Christ") and whoring after what Kähler dubbed "the so-called historical Jesus."

Again, Wills draws the bold inference that Jesus was initially a member of the sect of John the Baptist and a fellow-traveler with the Essenes. All this he infers from the simple statement of the gospels that Jesus underwent the baptism of John. According to Mark, so did pretty much everybody else in Jerusalem and all Judea. Were they Essenes, too? Wills is trying to dig beneath the gospels to explicate the historical figure lying behind them, the very thing he condemns Funk and the Jesus Seminar (not to mention Thomas Jefferson) for doing. One might multiply examples. But do you see what Wills is doing here? He is playing a shell game; he is covering his tracks. Having disavowed both the possibility that the facts about Jesus could ever be discovered and the attempt of critical

scholars to do it, Wills is now playing the same game, only without the criticism part. All his faith-talk simply signals he has given himself permission to
[begin p. 103]
take any and every gospel saying and story as literal fact, bearing no responsibility to do the hard work of sifting the wheat from the chaff.

And yet Wills *is* a critic of sorts. Like the Jesus Seminar, he whittles away at the raw materials of the gospels, omitting items that do not fit the picture of Jesus he prefers to find there. Only whereas critical scholars are honest enough to admit they are bracketing the texts as 'inauthentic' (another word Wills hates when the Seminar uses it, p. *xxv*), Wills just passes over the inconvenient texts in silence. His Jesus is an absolute pacifist, er, despite that little altercation in the temple. He is uncompromising in his advocacy of Samaritans and Gentiles and tax-collectors. Never mind that he is reported to have told his disciples to steer clear of Gentiles and Samaritans [Matt. 10:5]. Forget that he told us to disdain the excommunicated as if they were Gentiles or tax-collectors [Matt. 18:17].

Wills, it turns out, is not so far from the Seminar when it comes to gospel legends. For instance, Jesus did not really confront Satan in the desert during a period of forty days. No, but the story is 'true' nonetheless, for Wills, because it symbolizes the struggles Jesus endured before his public ministry. Or so Wills the historian of Jesus infers. Just as John Howard Yoder[15] used to do, Wills argues (fallaciously, I think) that the temptations refer to the options of winning public support by providing food for the masses, assuming political power, and becoming the pope of a new religion. Never mind that exactly the same legend is told of Abraham, the Buddha, and Zoroaster. Wills laughs off parallel myths with the pathetic old rationalization that all such myths were pre-Christian prophetic dreams of Jesus [p. *xxvii*]. But that doesn't make the story *fact*. Oh no. It is apostolic interpretation. I've got news for you, Mr. Wills: one man's interpretation is another man's legend.

Did Wills's personal savior actually eject demons from people? Maybe not: to call them 'possessed' somehow denoted just that they were excluded as unclean [p. 30]. And Jesus' ministry of healing? Wills says the

great thing was that he welcomed back the lepers and
[begin p. 104]

the dropsical and the menstruating into a loving social embrace. Is this Gary Wills or John Dominic Crossan—or Barbara Thiering? Wills is a great allegorizer of gospel narrative. After a while, the suspicion begins to dawn that Wills is perhaps not so conservative *vis-à-vis* miracles as he appears. It sounds almost as if he really means to echo Bultmann's dictum that the supernatural, mythic element of the gospel must be retained *but interpreted* instead of merely rejected and subtracted as the older Harnack-type Protestant Liberals did.[16] Wills mocks the Seminar for jettisoning the resurrection of Jesus [p. *xxv*], yet he himself has this to say: "Jesus was resurrected into us. We walk around living his life after his death. The Resurrection was not something that happened long ago, in a far place. It is happening now, everywhere on earth" [p. 138]. One wonders what N.T. Wright, to whose silly apologetics for the resurrection Wills gives half-hearted lip service initially, thinks of *that*.

And here we find the greatest irony in a book packed with them: Wills's Jesus is almost an identical twin of the Seminar Jesus (except that he also said all the stuff about himself that we read in John's gospel). Wills places Jesus firmly on the side, and in the company of, the marginalized, the rascals, rogues, whores, madmen, lepers, homosexuals, you name it. Wills sees Jesus as utterly disdainful of Jewish purity and Sabbath regulations. In this he goes even farther than the Jesus Seminar. Wills appears oblivious of the fact that the gospels all depict Jesus arguing that he is *not* breaking the Sabbath, only rejecting certain scribal notions of how to observe it. Wills somehow imagines that Jesus and his disciples were notorious outcasts because they flouted the holiness code of Leviticus, touching people with skin disease, bodily emissions, *etc.* This is absurd, though a common misconception. Leviticus never prohibits such contact. It assumes one must touch the dead, the ill, the menstruating. One incurs ritual pollution as a matter of course in daily life. And then one does what little things are needful to restore ritual purity. Jesus does not commit abominations, the big-ticket items that would have
[begin p. 105]

gotten him in trouble: the gospels don't have Jesus and the disciples going around having sex with animals or with each other. Jesus is never shown

scarfing down a ham sandwich or a shrimp cocktail. And when the gospels show him munching a hot dog, it is always Hebrew National. (Or, even if they don't show him eating franks, we may use Wills's method of inference to suppose that he did.)

Wills's Jesus was a feminist who shocked his contemporaries by traveling with women (even though the text never hints at such scandal—more *historical* inference by Wills) and letting them listen to him when they should have been seeing to Sunday dinner. Jesus according to Wills was absolutely anti-hierarchical and never thought of founding an institution. The notion of Peter as a priest or a bishop or a pope Wills finds laughable from the standpoint of "the Jesus of faith." He aims a number of barbs against Pope Ratzinger. His Jesus sounds for all the world like that of Adolf Holl[17]and Hans Küng.[18] This Jesus would never darken the door of a church and would be shown the door if he did try to enter.

Though aloof from any political program, this Jesus insisted that the poor be fed and the street people be welcomed. If he were here among us today, he would be leagued with persecuted gays instead of their holier-than-thou persecutors. How is it possible that Gary Wills and the Jesus Seminar end up with such similar Jesuses? Wills has already told us, at least implicitly: certain figures will attract only legends of a type appropriate to them. Or as Claude Levi-Strauss[19] said, all variants of the same basic myth will prove amenable to the same structural analyses. The same deep meanings will survive as the body of text, legend, and lore multiplies, like DNA regulating and directing new growth, though not without the occasional mutation.

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Wills's Christianity is definitely Jesus-centric. What did Jesus mean by the "reign of God"? Simply himself. He was the presence of the reign of God. Wills does not seem to find this reductionistic. Wills wants it understood that Jesus wanted it understood that he was the only path to the Father. And what does this entail? Not what you might think. Pretty much what Walter Rauschenbusch[20] said it did in the heyday of the Social Gospel movement: an egalitarian service to the poor and the outcast. Wills sounds like he is leading up to some version of orthodoxy but winds up with orthopraxy. His brief discussion of the atoning death of Jesus finally amounts to little more than the vacuous (pardon me) Moral

Influence Theory of Peter Abelard: the death of Jesus somehow demonstrates the love of God. Earlier I observed that Wills seems to share Bultmann's rejection of the old Liberal Protestant approach to gospel supernaturalism. It should not be abandoned, but rather interpreted. Well, now Wills himself sounds like an old-time Modernist (sorry for that apparent oxymoron, but one has to use it!). Wills once wrote a book called *Why I Am a Catholic*. This new one reads as if the title were *Why I Am Now a Liberal Protestant*. It sounds as if Wills's pious sneering at the work of the Jesus Seminar may be understood as political triangulating. He would seem to be trying to avert criticism from more conservative Catholics by saying, "Look, if it's liberals and Modernists you hate, you'll find them over there in Santa Rosa! Don't look at me!" I wonder if he will fool anyone.

Charlotte's Web of Assumptions[21]

Charlotte Allen is a well-read outsider, and her book *The Human Christ[22]* is written for outsiders who are interested in the historical Jesus debate but lack the time to familiarize themselves with the ever-expanding body of literature on the subject. Allen has absorbed
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a lot of it, and some of her chapters are quite helpful in bringing Schweitzer's classic survey up to date. She shows justified skepticism over many of the most recent historical Jesuses, and one can only cheer her on in these cases. But there is something amiss here. Just as Luke apparently sought to supplant Mark and Q [Luke 1:1–4], so does Charlotte Allen seem to want to supersede Schweitzer, whom she faults for being a pedantic stringer-together of endless book reviews. This assessment makes a strength into a weakness as far as I am concerned, since Schweitzer's book is an invaluable repository of information about a whole raft of fascinating tomes long unobtainable. She also underestimates the synthetic dimension of his study and gives no hint of the ubiquitous wit and gift for brilliant and striking metaphor Schweitzer displayed.

Where she does supplement Schweitzer, covering much of the same ground, is to substitute gossipy background information (itself quite interesting!) about the scholars both discuss. But Allen also makes much of the supposedly serious neglect by Schweitzer of a handful of English dilettantes and pamphleteers whose (by her account) amateurish and

sophomoric attacks on the traditional Jesus of Christian faith preceded the work of the German Hermann Samuel Reimarus, with whose writings Schweitzer's survey begins. One wonders why, if these Englishmen were such inconsequential hacks as Allen makes them, she would think it so significant for Schweitzer to have omitted them? The answer, I think, is that Allen dismisses virtually all the scholars she discusses as being on the same level! Throughout her book, Allen, a confessed Roman Catholic, seems possessed of a notion that any theory, any viewpoint, is an arbitrary dogma, an unscientific myth (except hers, of course), that one picks them up by osmosis or by hypnosis if one is not careful, and that such theories completely bias the outcome of one's research from the outset.

Such researches, by the likes of David Friedrich Strauss,[23] Alfred [begin p. 108]

Loisy,[24] F.C. Baur,[25] and Rudolf Bultmann,[26] can be smugly dismissed once their supposedly defining viewpoint is revealed. Allen pays virtually no attention to the data and the specific arguments these scholars offered for their views. It is enough for her to know that Baur was a Hegelian, Bultmann was an existentialist. They must have whittled down Jesus to size to fit their predilections. In fact, Baur's particular schema of early Christian history was established in its essentials before he ever read Hegel, and its validity or lack of it has nothing to do with any special dogma of Hegel. Similarly, Bultmann did adopt Heidegger's existentialist framework to demythologize the New Testament, but was it an arbitrary choice? Hardly: Heidegger had himself been a Catholic seminarian and got his ideas by demythologizing Christianity himself in the first place! And to charge that Bultmann derived his scientific model of the universe as a closed system from his doctoral studies of ancient Epicureanism—! She makes it sound as if Strauss's *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, no doubt the most detailed and meticulous book ever written on the gospels even today, were simply a function of left-wing Hegelianism and German imperialism. Pity the poor reader who has read Charlotte Allen and is discouraged by her from reading Strauss's (or Schweitzer's) infinitely superior work. Loisy she accuses flat out of embracing gospel criticism just because he "wanted to be thought forward-looking." A single glance at any page of Loisy's still arresting books will show the absurdity of this libel.

Allen is in the final analysis an apologist of the same stripe as Luke Timothy Johnson, whose blurb, not surprisingly, appears on the dustjacket. She employs the standard moves of this school of anti-critical retrenchers. For instance, she gloats that Baur's theories, as well as his dating of the New Testament books, were disproved and
[begin p. 109]

are just plain wrong, though, mysteriously, many scholars still seem to be influenced by them. This is just a spin-doctoring way of saying that though some have criticized Baur's views, others do not believe Baur has been refuted at all and thus continue to hold to his opinions. Like James Charlesworth of Princeton and the late Raymond E. Brown (who nonetheless was still a little too left-wing for her tastes), she rejoices that we can now ignore the massive scholarship of the History-of-Religions School that interpreted the Gospel of John and the epistles of Paul in Gnostic categories. No matter how compelling the Gnostic and Mystery Religion analogies to the New Testament are, the mere fact that there exist some Jewish parallels (in the Dead Sea Scrolls), no matter how remote or incidental, automatically entitles these apologists to leave early Christian origins right where they belong (according to Christian theology), in the Jewish (= Old Testament) womb.

Some of Allen's gloating is premature. She delights that Robert Eisenman's first-century C.E. dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls was refuted by the Carbon dating he himself urged be performed, but she seems unaware of more recent tests that have vindicated him. She appeals to John A.T. Robinson's *The Priority of John*,[27] as many apologists do, to vindicate the historical reliability of that gospel, but she ought to have read Maurice Casey's scathing 1996 rebuttal *Is John's Gospel True?[28]* which handily reveals Robinson's last book as the embarrassment it is.

Books like this one try to smuggle past the reader the outrageous assumption that everyone has something to prove except Christian apologists. Apparently, "everybody's got something to hide except me and my monkey."[29] For Allen, it is the height of philosophical eccentricity to find miracle stories historically implausible; it is ridiculous and reductionist, downright superstitious in fact, to make the gospels myth and legend. There is something Orwellian here. *The Human Christ* is one more

attempt, with the empty urbanity of a G.K.
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Chesterton or a William F. Buckley, to assure the troubled reader that all is well, he can return to his dogmatic slumber. I think of another such pearl of smug wisdom from Anglican pundit Dean Inge. Making sport, as Allen does, of much recent band-wagon theology, Dean Inge once quipped that anyone who marries himself to the spirit of the age will often find himself a widower. Maybe so, but we have to ask, is necrophilia a better option?

Jesus of Nashville[30]

Daniel Spoto's *The Hidden Jesus: A New Life[31]* is yet another stone in the current avalanche of pseudo-historical Jesus books. The irony in most of these recent books is that, while they pose as historical treatments, they are manifestly theological tracts trying to undo the damage being done by the Jesus Seminar and its congeners to the simple faith of the pew potatoes. Spoto's book falls victim to the same ambivalence: he is simultaneously concerned to demonstrate how well the gospel Jesus fits into the socio-historical context of the times and to get it through the reader's head that the gospels are soaked in myth and are anything but biographies in the modern sense. The book seems to bubble unstably like a charmed cauldron from which anything may next emerge.

Spoto is himself something of a hybrid, a New Testament Ph.D. and a professional biographer of such celebrities as Alfred Hitchcock, Princess Diana, Liz Taylor, James Dean, Laurence Olivier, and Tennessee Williams. One would think Spoto ideally suited to write a life of Jesus book. After all, he would certainly seem to know the difference between ancient and modern biographies, and perhaps we might expect an appropriate combination of relevant elements of the two. But instead, what we read is essentially apologetics and evangelism. Spoto seems to want to vindicate Catholic Christianity (albeit of a somewhat Loisy-like Modernist stripe) in the eyes of its cultured despisers. The result is both theoretically incoherent and annoyingly cloying.

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Writing in the tradition of apologists like N.T. Wright and Luke Timothy Johnson, Spoto stipulates a party-line list of critical positions taken for granted by conservative apologists but in fact highly debatable.

He is sure that the canonical gospels stem from a mere twenty to seventy years after the death of Jesus [p. 59], but this is far from certain. I favor a range of seventy to one hundred twenty years after the conventional estimates for the dates of Jesus. But the dates Spoto provides are still ample for allowing a vast flood of legend-mongering and fabrication of sayings. He himself implicitly admits as much, chalking up all the spectacular miracles (virginal conception, water-into-wine, *etc.*) to the genius of the creative writer-theologians of the gospels ("the inspired invention of new metaphors—not a fabrication of untruth, but an entirely fresh way of telling the truth"— p. 33).

He continues: "and we have accurate and complete manuscript copies of those writings dating from the third and fourth centuries" [*ibid.*]. This is simply an affirmation of faith! The gap between the hypothetical writing dates and our first copies leaves a tunnel period about which we may only speculate. The manuscript tradition may be accurate, or it may not.

Why are only four gospels included in the New Testament canon? Why none of the gospels penned by Gnostics, Ebionites, Encratites, *etc.*? "That their [*i.e.*, the canonical four gospels'] faith was not anomalous, that it was emblematic and representative, is demonstrated by the fact that the earliest Christians affirmed these four and rejected others as representative of their faith in Jesus" [p. 62]. The earliest Christians? Does he mean Irenaeus in 180 CE? Eusebius in 325 CE? The whole process of consolidation of a canon does not belong in the 'earliest period' of Christianity or any religion. Similarly, Spoto gratuitously dispenses with the astonishing parallels between the gospel miracle stories and those of rabbi-magicians like Hanina ben Dosa and Hellenistic wonder-workers like Apollonius of Tyana with the dogmatic assertion that these tales must be copying the gospels.

One gets the feeling that Spoto is carrying on an internal debate of sorts, since what he attacks in pejorative language on some pages
[begin p. 112]
he seems to defend in euphemisms on other pages. Like his mentor Raymond E. Brown, Spoto demythologizes much of the gospel narrative as symbolic theology in narrative form. He recognizes that midrash and fiction are techniques of positive creativity and hardly to be shunned by

the theological exegete. He reiterates this point almost tiresomely, knowing that conservative readers will need some convincing. But when he senses that the astute reader may be wondering if the gospel story may be fictional to the core, the theological Hyde transforms back into the apologetical Jeckyll: “It is... not a tenable position that these complex, singular and incomprehensible mysteries were concocted by a group of semiliterate first-century Palestinians, or by a quartet of community writers a half-century later. Hoaxes, much less literary frauds, do not change the course of world history” [p. 72]. Maybe Spoto thinks they shouldn’t, but they do, as much of the pseudepigraphical content of the Bible (*e.g.*, Deuteronomy), not to mention the Book of Mormon, has done just that. But the point is: what is the difference between Spoto’s lionized creative gospel writers and these scheming frauds except the color of the language used to describe them? We are shocked to read Spoto’s sarcastic put-down of those who argue “Whether or not miracles can or did occur is unimportant... what matters is the significance of the accounts.” Spoto scratches his head: “This is a curious approach, for it is hard to understand how something can have significance if it never happened” [p. 110]. Curious it may be, but for the life of me, it sounds just like the approach of Spoto himself elsewhere in the book.

Spoto is willing to demythologize the ‘big miracles,’ but he cannot bring himself to cut loose the healings, I suspect, because he needs them to anchor his portrait of Jesus as (like *Saturday Night Live*’s Stuart Smalley) a caring nurturer. He has tried to be a respectable modern up to this point, but then he jumps to post-modernism. Just as Shroud defenders and Creationists must swallow hard and discount Carbon 14 dating, Spoto reminds us that modern physics has cast doubt on the old Newtonian notion of ironclad laws of nature, the longtime nemesis of the miraculous.
It never ceases to amaze me
[begin p. 113]

that desperate apologists fail to recognize that, of all people, they can least afford to do away with natural law. Without a fixed framework of natural law, any apparent suspension or violation of such laws becomes a mere freak phenomenon. Such a prodigy can logically no longer function as what the New Testament calls ‘a sign.’ A pointer to something beyond the matrix of laws. If natural law is dead, then the resurrection of Jesus is on no higher a level than the Abominable Snowman.

Spoto mocks liberal theologians and critics for replacing Jesus of Nazareth with a bogus Jesus of Nashville (yuk, yuk) who is pictured as preaching a gospel of feel-goodism. And yet Spoto himself seems to reduce what he calls the transcendent profundities of the gospel to the most pathetic devotional banalities. “That may be the deepest meaning of the kingdom of God—the gradual awareness of every human being of attachment to a loving Creator” [p. 57]. That’s *it*? One might have expected something more given the hype on the preceding pages, where he says the New Testament myths strive “to express experiences unprecedented in human history” [p. 21]. “One knows that one is redeemed for meaning by ‘knowing’ the person of Jesus” [p. 30]—and, no doubt, *vice-versa*.

Spoto’s cheer-leading leads him to make misleading and outright false generalizations on behalf of his favorite religion. Was Jesus “announcing a completely new way of considering God” [p. 58]? This is chauvinistic fantasy; virtually all the sayings of Jesus can be paralleled from the rich traditions of Judaism, Cynicism, and Stoicism. Similarly, Spoto assures us that of all the world religions, only Christianity offers the doctrine of a ‘downward movement’ from God to humanity, but how can he be ignorant of the major Hindu teaching of the avatars of Vishnu and Shiva? *Avatar* denotes ‘divine incarnation’ and literally means ‘descent.’

Every serious reader of books like Spoto’s must ask if the modern critical reader can simultaneously recognize that the biblical myths are picturesque expressions of faith—and continue to hold that faith? Isn’t the jig up? We can see that fundamentalists do indeed express their faith by means of these myths, and the way they do

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it is *by believing those myths*. This is why they are so stubborn in the face of arguments like Spoto’s that they need not continue to believe them literally. It is important to note Spoto’s predicament: he professes to hold the faith of the New Testament writers, but he certainly does not share their presumably naïve belief in the stories they told (does Spoto think they expected their ancient readers to demythologize as they read?). If the content of their faith was not identical to the stories they told, what was the faith they were trying to convey so obliquely? Here is where (and why) Spoto becomes so ambiguous and foggy. Was the New Testament gospel

about vague theism? A nebulous sense of belonging in the universe? His is the dilemma of the very theological liberals and rationalists he pretends to condemn.

One wonders whether Spoto would make the same apologia for the propagandistic falsehoods of Afrocentrism as he does for Christocentrism. I doubt he would. The one case seems clearer than the other, I suspect, because religious faith clouds the lens, as it so often does.

[1] For example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1977].

[2] Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* [NY: Paulist Press, 1973].
[3] Originally published in *American Rationalist*, July/August, 2011.
[4] Josef Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth. Part Two, Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011].
[5] Charles H. Talbert, ed., *Reimarus: Fragments*. Trans. Ralph S. Fraser. Lives of Jesus Series [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970: 226–234, 239].
[6] J.C. O'Neill, *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting* [London: SPCK, 1961: 85].
[7] Drews, *The Christ Myth*, pp. 271–272.
[8] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 4/1, Spring 1997.
[9] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke–Acts*. SBL Dissertation Series 39 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1977].
[10] James Barr, *Fundamentalism* [Westminster Press, 1978: 85–89].
[11] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1986].
[12] Originally published in *Fourth R*, 19/4, September/December 2006.
[13] Gary Wills, *What Jesus Meant* [NY: Viking, 2006].
[14] Martin Kähler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*. Trans. Carl E. Braaten. Seminar Editions [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964].
[15] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972: 55–58].
[16] Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology." In Hans Werner Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*. Trans. Reginald H. Fuller [NY: Harper & Row Torchbooks, 1961: 12–15].
[17] Adolf Holl, *Jesus in Bad Company*. Trans. Simon King [NY: Avon Discus Books, 1974].
[18] Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*. Trans. Edward Quinn [Garden City: Doubleday, 1976: 215–277].
[19] Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf [Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1967: 213].
[20] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* [NY: Abingdon Press, 1945], Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus* [NY: Association Press, 1921].
[21] Originally published in *Free Inquiry*, 19/3, Summer 1999.
[22] Charlotte Allen, *The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus*. [NY: Free Press, 1999].
[23] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. Trans. George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans). Lives of Jesus Series [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972].
[24] Alfred Loisy, *The Birth of the Christian Religion*. Trans. L.P. Jacks [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948].
[25] Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, his Epistles and Teachings*. Trans. Eduard Zeller, rev. A. Menzies [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003].

[26] Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Trans. John Marsh [NY: Harper & Row, 2nd ed., 1968].
[27] John A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* [London: SCM Press, 1985].
[28] Maurice Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?* [NY: Routledge, 1996].
[29] The Beatles, "Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey" *The Beatles* (The White Album) [Hollywood: Capitol Records, 1968].
[30] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 8/1, Spring 2001.
[31] Daniel Spoto, *The Hidden Jesus: A New Life* [NY: St. Martin's Press, 1998].

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Chapter Four:

Jewish Jesus

One suspects that the current wave of Jesus books that seek to place Jesus not only in the historical context of Second Temple Judaism, but also safely within the ranks of observant, proto-orthodox Jews are chiefly motivated by the desire to facilitate Jewish-Christian ecumenism. These scholars are fashioning a historical Jesus made to order as a compromise negotiating position. This, of course, is an old habit: making supposedly critical exegesis the obedient handmaid for theology. It used to be that more militantly Protestant critics, like Ernst Käsemann, tipped the boat the other way, making not only Paul but Jesus, too, into a Lutheran polemicist. This took the form of Jesus disdaining the Jewish Torah and flouting its commandments.[1]

Besides being baldly tendentious, the new ecumenical Jesus scholarship is viciously circular. The scholars propose, "I bet we could make more sense of Jesus by presupposing he was a faithful Jew, so let's get to work on him." And then they run every bit of gospel material through the kosher meat grinder, imposing an Orthodox Jewish stamp. As Bob Dole once said during the infamous 2000 'hanging-chad' controversy, "They're not *counting* votes in there; they're *casting* votes in there!" Scholars like James Charlesworth are Judaizing Jesus, just as Paul's opponents did the Antiochenes and the Galatians. Judaism in, Judaism out. [2] Heck, Jesus starts looking like a space alien if you paint the evidence that way, too.

Thankfully, there are other scholars, some Jews themselves, who have explored the possible connections with other types of Judaism that are not so theologically convenient. For them, Jesus might very well have been a sword-bearing Zealot, or a wild-eyed Hebrew
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Shaman, or a charismatic Hasidic guru like Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Essene Oddities[3]

Hugh J. Schonfield's many books, the most notorious of which is *The Passover Plot*, represent what most professional biblical scholars would probably consider popularization of the wrong sort. That is, he had the tendency to gather all manner of arcana, odds and ends of ancient data which make little sense in any conventional scholarly paradigm, fashion them into wild hypotheses and unleash them on an ill-educated reading public impatient of fine distinctions and perversely eager to welcome theories bidding fair to 'blow the lid off Christianity.' Schonfield's books, in other words, have the same sort of appeal to the non-scholarly public as do outright fictions like Irving Wallace's *The Word[4]* and Peter Van Greenaway's *The Judas Gospel*.[5] Any scholar requires a dose of speculative imagination, but most view Schonfield as having been cursed with too much of a good thing. They surely think likewise of *The Essene Odyssey*.[6]

The Dead Sea Scrolls have, since the announcement of their discovery decades ago, provided a rich field for speculation of the kind we associate with Schonfield. Edmund Wilson,[7] Andre Dupont-Sommer,[8] and John Allegro[9] all drew conclusions about the possible intimate relations between the Scrolls' authors and the earliest followers of Jesus. Schonfield's own early ruminations on the Scrolls[10] were comparatively mild, though intriguing, while others discerned

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in the Scrolls indications of a crucified Messiah before Jesus, of a Qumran apprenticeship for Jesus or John the Baptist or both, even of an identity between Jesus and the Teacher of Righteousness. And the greatest rumor in this early period of 'Qumran fever,' at least among the general public, was that far more dramatic revelations contained in the Scrolls were being withheld, kept like a too-bright light under a bushel, by a cabal of scholars acting in the interests of the established Church.

By the late 1980s it had become clear that many scholars not lucky enough to be part of the elite International Team originally placed in charge of the Scrolls had plenty of reason to level their own charges of conspiracy. The International Team had become a secretive order jealously restricting access to the Scrolls to themselves, their designated successors,

and their pet grad students. This scholarly indignation finally built to the point where the monopoly of John Strugnell, J.T. Milik, *et al*. was broken by the announcement of the Huntington Library that it possessed photographs of the Scrolls and would make them available to any scholar who wished to see them. This latest stage of controversy over the Scrolls sparked a new wave of interest and of sometimes wild speculation, some written on the eve of the democratization of the Scrolls, some after. It was in this context that Schonfield's *The Essene Odyssey*, originally published in 1984 by Element Books, was reissued in 1991.

Schonfield is clear about his basic approach: "[We] will have the thrill of perceiving connections and associations... no effort has been spared in assembling rare and remote witnesses" [p. 93]. Schonfield's is adventurous scholarship. He is sure enough of his Sherlockian judgment and eagle eye to dare to trace out connections between the most disparate hints. Collingwood[11] made clear that all history writing is a matter of spinning a delicate web between those items the historian judges provisionally acceptable as 'facts,' in other words, eligible puzzle pieces. Schonfield shares with Walter Bauer[12]
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the conviction that smoke denotes the presence of fire. By contrast, more orthodox scholars will be content to abandon to a cognitive genizah the large pile of seemingly relevant but mystifying items that Schonfield deftly juggles, and then to go along blithely assuming that if the evidence is scant we can not only refrain from saying what happened, we can continue to act as though nothing happened.

Schonfield, however, assumes that if the evidence is so suggestive and yet so scanty, the best guess is that most of the evidence has been suppressed because it was too suggestive of events or ideas once (and perhaps still) perceived to be dangerous. What does it mean that for some centuries rabbinic sources attest a continuing practice of clandestine use of Jesus' name in healings of Jews by Jews? What does it mean that Epiphanius preserves a tradition that Jesus' opponents were wrong to deny his Levitical right to priestly prerogatives? That John son of Zebedee is made a colleague of Asaph ben Berechiah, a legendary healer, in an old Hebrew medical work called *Sepher Refu'ot*? That a supposedly second-century CE Sanskrit work *Bhavishya Maha Puranya* has Rajah Shalewahin

encounter an itinerant holy man who claims to be Isa Masih (Jesus Messiah in Arabic)?

Schonfield is not willing to shake his head and pretend that these bits mean nothing rather than something. He is willing to go out on a limb, to fly high in the clouds of speculation to view all these far-flung atolls of evidence synoptically, trying to picture the lineaments of the sunken continent of which they were perhaps once mountaintops. In the nature of the case no such reconstruction can be very compelling, though in the absence of any alternative theories to account for the same data, one might have to award Schonfield the prize for the 'most probable' reconstruction, even if by default.

Schonfield's main project is to suggest (somewhat in the manner of Robert Eisenman) that the various common features of ancient Jewish and Christian sectarian groups mark them as simply different bubbles in the same general froth, and that the whole heady thing may be called *Essene*. Accepting the traditional consensus pegging the Dead Sea Scrolls as Essene in origin, Schonfield feels free to expound the Scrolls as the origin of much that we find in other
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sectarian movements. He notes that the various Nazoreans, Essenes, Mandaeans, and others probably cross-fertilized one another's doctrines and practices, especially as refugees from the various communities fled from Palestine to Syria and beyond from Seleucid, Herodian, and Roman persecution.

This matrix of hypothetical borrowing leads Schonfield to posit an indiscriminate application of similar Messianic attributes and mythologoumena to several figures, including John the Baptist, Jesus the Nazorean, James the Just, and the Teacher of Righteousness. Of these, especially important to Schonfield are the legendary personae of the biblical Joseph and Asaph. The former, he judges, citing the Book of Jubilees and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, seems to have become a symbol for a priestly Messiah whose sufferings atone for his people, just as Joseph was betrayed by his brethren for the ultimate benefit of all. This trajectory touches, in Schonfield's reckoning, the Teacher of Righteousness, since he is said to have been ambushed by his enemies on

the Day of Atonement, while Jubilees similarly traces the Day of Atonement to the commemoration of Joseph's sufferings.

Jesus, too, as Christian typology has always hastened to show, fits the Joseph pattern. And rabbinic apocalyptic envisioned a preliminary Messiah ben Joseph who would atone by his battlefield death for the sins of the people, paving the way for the victorious Messiah ben David. (Schonfield implicitly suggests that the designations of Jesus as 'son of Joseph' and 'son of David' are pieces of a similar Christology, referring to the two stages of his Messianic career, only later misunderstood and concretized as literal genealogical information.)

Asaph, confidant of the sorcerer-king Solomon, as later Jewish and Islamic legend fashioned him, and a master of medicine, is connected by Schonfield with no less a range of characters. Asaph ben Berechiah appears not only in old Hebrew sources but also in the traditions of the Bani Israel of Afghanistan, who understand themselves to be remnants of the Diaspora (the Assyrian deportation, but Schonfield adjusts it to the Babylonian deportation). Schonfield
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makes him one also with Saint Joasaph (Yus-Asaph or Joseph-Asaph) of the widespread legend of Barlaam and Joasaph and with the occupant of the venerated tomb in Srinagar, Kashmir.

One feels that Schonfield was mightily tempted to go the whole way with the Ahmadiyya apologists from whom he learns much, and to identify the occupant of that tomb with Jesus himself, having survived the cross and wandered as far as India. He has already paved the way by seeming to imply that the clandestine tradition of Jewish healing in the name of Jesus must have some relation to the association with John son of Zebedee as the disciple of Asaph. But he finally denies any identification of Jesus with Asaph. Though willing to entertain the possibility that Jesus was taken down alive from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea and other friendly Essenes (mistaken for angels when later glimpsed at the tomb), he cannot readily imagine, any more than Strauss could, that such a pathetic Jesus would have been able long to survive, much less to resume an earthly ministry or to make the long trek to the East.

So who *is* buried in Grant's Tomb? Schonfield posits that the Yus-Asaph interred there is none other than the Teacher of Righteousness. Not

only did Essene ideas drift across the Middle East as far as Afghanistan, the greatest Essene of them all did, too.

Perhaps it is after all true that in scholarship as in sports, what matters is not whether you win but how you play the game. And what makes Schonfield's works more valuable than the scholarly guild has ever recognized is how he plays the game. He patiently gathers the bits of historical shrapnel, some of them possibly still live shells avoided by the timid, and he shows that whatever one makes of them, one really ought to try to make something of them instead of tacitly assuming they are pieces of nothing, relics of events that never happened.

Man with a Mission

Even in his last (and posthumously published) manuscript, *Jesus: Man – Mystic – Messiah*,[13] Hugh Schonfield manages to stir the pot
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anew. I recall how my eighth grade physics instructor, Mr. Condello, responded to my teen-age fundamentalist zeal by recommending Schonfield's *The Passover Plot*. At that time I did not know that this was neither the first nor the last book the indefatigable Schonfield would have written on the subject of Jesus the Nazorean. All I knew then was that here was the voice of doubt. I recall how a fellow fideist warned me, "Don't read that book—it's poison!" That is, the book was inimical to a faith fortified with ignorance. Many years later, teaching a freshman New Testament course at Drew University, I assigned the book. It duly shocked many of the students, though by this time I recognized how essentially conservative was Schonfield's treatment of the gospels and their historical value.

In the meantime I had read many more works by other scholars on the search for the Jesus of history, and I had come to espouse alternative theories, far to the left of Hugh Schonfield's. And yet it was only after these many years, having read much of the scholarship Schonfield himself appealed to (*e.g.*, the similarly underrated Robert Eisler) that I fully appreciated what vast and deep erudition Schonfield had brought to his task. Among his other books, *According to the Hebrews*, *Those Incredible Christians*, *The Authentic New Testament*, and *The Essene Odyssey* top my list, though I have to admit I love them all. The author was always able to

dredge up some eye-popping piece of esoterica no other scholar had considered. I soon learned how little it mattered that the serious student agree with every point, even the main point, of a book. The thing is to find fresh food for thought and to encounter new perspectives not presented in the stale tomes of the orthodox and conventional.

As soon as I began to read *Jesus: Man – Mystic – Messiah*, out came my underlining pen. Never looked at it *that* way before! And this is so, even though the book is his most basic one on Jesus. He devotes a succinct passage or two to the accuracy of the gospels, the principles to be employed in cutting away mythical accretions, and the great gulf that lies between the original Jewishness of Jesus and his gospel on the one hand and the Gentile Christian reinterpretation
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of it on the other. Schonfield's work is rooted firmly in a particular generation of New Testament criticism, that of Rendel Harris, R.H. Strachan, R.H. Charles, and others. On the whole, his estimate of the gospels recalls that of Adolf Harnack: even after you subtract the legendary and Hellenistic distortions, you have enough left to reconstruct a striking historical figure. But when it comes to the teaching and mission of Jesus, Schonfield was much closer to Albert Schweitzer. Both rejected Harnack's view that apocalyptic belief was merely window-dressing for an essentially moral message. Like Schweitzer, Schonfield came to understand Jesus as a preacher of national renewal and restoration.

This is still a viable position held by many scholars. But one misses in this, as in many of Schonfield's books, any discussion or even awareness of whole generations of gospel scholarship. So much has happened in the field that one burns with curiosity to know how Schonfield's own theories might have been affected had he taken seriously the work of other, more recent writers, including Bultmann, Bornkamm, Robert M. Fowler, G.A. Wells, and Burton L. Mack. Like Schonfield, G.A Wells has written many sequels to his original book on Jesus, but unlike Schonfield, each one is considerably updated, interacting with contemporary scholarship in general and his critics in particular. We are the poorer for Schonfield's self-imposed isolation.

One surprising absence from this book, yet one that might make it a good one to recommend to the new reader of Schonfield, is the omission

of any discussion of the notorious ‘Passover plot’ itself. Schonfield had imbibed from the eighteenth-century Rationalists the notion that Jesus set about his messianic career with a detailed game plan, engineering prophetic fulfillments to establish his messianic credentials. This theory scandalized many orthodox readers, who were only too happy to misunderstand Schonfield. They supposed he was casting Jesus in the role of a charlatan and a hoaxer. Of course, Schonfield only meant that, if Jesus inferred aspects of the messianic role from his study of scripture, he cannot have helped marching forward into his appointed destiny, intentionally seeking and taking the opportunities he found to fulfill scripture. How is the orthodox
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view much different? Do they think Jesus only unwittingly fulfilled prophecy, realizing it only after the fact?

Of course, the major point of objection is another bit of Schonfield’s debt to the old Protestant Rationalism, his near embrace of the Swoon Theory. Schonfield posited that Jesus sought to be crucified but to cheat death, appearing alive again after a prearranged rescue from the cross. In fact, it is not uncommon to read that Schonfield subscribed to the Swoon Theory pure and simple. He did not. He admitted Jesus died, killed by the unanticipated spear thrust of the soldier [John 19:34]. The resurrection appearances were cases of mistaken identity, a theory based on the repeated emphasis in the texts [Luke 24:16; John 20:14; Mark 16:12] that the Risen Jesus was at first unrecognized.

But of all this *Jesus: Man – Mystic – Messiah* is innocent, as if Schonfield was tired of fighting that battle. But the omission also makes it clear that, for Schonfield, these elements were never central to his consideration of Jesus anyway. His goal was to delineate a Jewish prophet dedicated to the renewal of his people and to their leavening influence on the rest of humanity. This last book focuses on what Schonfield always thought most significant about Jesus, his dedication to the will of God, not some clever agenda of scheming and manipulation.

No reader of this book can fail to notice the remarkable parallel between Hugh Schonfield’s own religious explorations and those he hypothesizes for Jesus. Schonfield recalls how his interest in the historical Jesus was kindled by his early acquaintance with Christians (first

Christadelphian sectarians, then evangelical revivalists) during the apocalyptic days of World War One. The world was exploding around him, giving birth to new and unimagined dangers and possibilities. These factors pushed him into studying the apocalyptic inheritance of his native Judaism as well as inquiring into a man whom Christians but not Jews venerated as the Jewish Messiah. We have a sense of *déjà vue* when Schonfield describes Jesus as a youth soaking up the influences of the apocalyptic movement and the earth-shaking events of his own century. Has Schonfield, like so many
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historical Jesus questers, merely remade Jesus in his own image? Or has he rather followed the principle of analogy so absolutely central to historical research: understanding the past on analogy with present experience? Do we end up with a Jesus modeled after Schonfield, or a Schonfield modeled after Jesus? There is much to learn either way.

Code and Cup[14]

Robert Eisenman's *The New Testament Code: The Cup of the Lord, the Damascus Covenant, and the Blood of Christ*,[15] is a massive sequel to his great opus *James the Brother of Jesus* (1998). The book is a very great challenge to read. Those who found *James the Brother of Jesus* too long, too redundant, too circuitous, will only find those sins magnified here. One almost feels Eisenman, like an apocalyptic scribe, wants to make his readers prove their mettle by working for the pay-off. One is inevitably put in mind of one's adolescent determination to embark on reading the Bible straight through, only to get bogged down in Numbers or Deuteronomy. But one must simply soldier on. It is worth the time. Whether Eisenman is correct in his apparent conviction that it is necessary to cover every relevant document, surveying all possible cross references, and doing it again every time he comes to the same item in the next document, I cannot say. But he does make his case that there is an inescapable commonality of terminology and conceptuality, sometimes used ironically or satirically, between a mass of texts which need to be placed together on a mental map if one is to grasp the shape of the religious world in which they all float as continents.

And the first achievement of *The New Testament Code* hard won through this methodology is the realization that the Dead Sea Scrolls stem from the mid to late first century CE (equivocal Carbon dating results no longer even being relevant), and that they represent the sectarian baptizing *Schwärmerei* known variously as the Essenes, Zealots, Nasoreans, Masbotheans, Sabaeans—*and Jewish Christians*
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headed by James the Just. Endless references to the armies of the Kittim and "the kings of the Peoples" make the date clear even before we get to the catalogue of terminological and conceptual links between the Scrolls, the New Testament, and the Pseudo-Clementines. I should say that in all these comparisons Eisenman has established a system of correspondences fully as convincing, and for the same reasons, as the Preterist interpretation of the Book of Revelation by R.H. Charles[16] and others. I just do not see any room for serious doubt any more. Jacob L. Teicher[17] was right; Eisenman is right: the Scrolls are the legacy of the Jerusalem Christians led by the Heirs of Jesus: James the Just, Simeon bar Cleophas, and Judas Thomas. The Teacher of Righteous was James the Just. The Spouter of Lies who "repudiated the Torah in the midst of the congregation" was Paul. It was he who "founded a congregation on lies," recruiting the tragically misled "Simple of Ephraim," converts from among the Gentile God-fearers who knew no better. The Wicked Priest was Ananus ben Ananus, whom Josephus credits with lynching James on the Day of Atonement.

Granted, Eisenman indulges in overkill, flooding the reader with so many convergences of language and basic concepts that [begin p. 126]

the unsympathetic reader may dismiss him as simply documenting a common atmosphere of belief and language characteristic, not of specific sects (or factions of sects), but of the period in general. But there is a smaller set of correspondences which are sharp enough to persuade me that, *e.g.*, 1 Corinthians 10 is using a specific portion of the Covenant of Damascus (a well-known ancient document, as its presence in the Cairo Genizah as well as Qumran suggests), namely column III, 2–7 [p. 919], or that the Habakkuk Pesher means to refute Paul's use of the famous Habakkuk 2:4 (see pp. 903–904). These comparisons are as telling as that

which persuades us that James 2:14–24 means to refute Romans 3:27–4:5*ff*.

Ironically, all these correspondences serve as collateral evidence for a much clearer identification of early Christianity with the sect of the Scrolls. Have you ever read the truism that the Scrolls neglect to name their parent body? And yet their sect is again and again called both 'the Poor' (*Ebionim*, Ebionites) and 'the Way.' These, of course, are the earliest known self-designations of Christians, as Acts tells us [Acts 9:2 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; *cf*. Gal. 2:10] long before they were called 'Christians'—by outsiders [Acts 11:26; 26:28; *cf*. 1 Peter 4:16]. The refusal to recognize the identity of the nomenclature, and therefore of the groups behind them, is astonishing and attests a simple unwillingness to factor the Scrolls into Christian Origins on such an integral level. Even so, Eisenman's reading of the Scrolls tells us much about the dawn era of Christianity, certainly more than some will want to know. But with *The New Testament Code* we have reached a crossroads. Will we begin to take into account all this new data and move forward along the indicated lines? Or will we continue to temporize and find new excuses to isolate our conventional assumptions and play in the pool of Eusebian apologetics?

Eisenman recapitulates the basic outlines of his discoveries about James' role as obscured by Acts. The election of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot is a mask for the election of James the Just to replace the absent Jesus as his *caliph* (the root reference behind the epithets of both 'James of *Alphaeus*' and 'Simeon bar-*Cleophas*,' both meaning the same thing). James' epithet, *the Just*, *à la* Noth's
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redundancy principle,[18] remains in the text, albeit shouldered aside, in the guise of the other nominee for the job, 'Joseph bar-Sabbas *Justus*.' (Why even retain the name, unless there is another purpose?)

James bar-Zebedee is another fictive double for James the Just, and his elimination in Acts 12:2 is merely the dropping of the mask before James the Just can appear in his own name in chapter 15.

James was a rainmaker like Elijah, Honi the Circle-maker, and Hanan the Wise. Nathanael is another mask for James. Jesus finds him, conspicuously, sitting beneath a fig tree, the posture of rain-makers as they waited (in a gesture of anticipative, imitative magic) for their prayers to

be answered. And Jesus tells him he will, *like the Genesis Jacob*, witness heaven open, revealing the Son of Man, which Nathanael does not see in John but which James does see, at his martyrdom, according to Hegesippus.

James' stoning to death after proclaiming his vision of the Son of Man standing in heaven has been (as Hans-Joachim Schoeps first noted) [19] changed into the martyrdom of Stephen after announcing the same vision.

But Eisenman adds more. For instance, he argues that the resurrection appearance of Jesus to James the Just in the Gospel according to the Hebrews is the origin of both Luke's Emmaus Road story and John's Doubting Thomas tale. Here is the ostensible original:

Now the Lord, when he had given the linen cloth to the servant of the priest, went to James and appeared to him, for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour wherein he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen again from among those who sleep. And he said to him, "Hail!" And he called to the servants, who were greatly amazed. "Bring," said the Lord, "a
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> table and bread." He took bread and blessed and broke and gave it to James the Just and said to him, "My brother, eat your bread, for the Son of man has risen from them who sleep."

In the Emmaus story, Jesus appears to a pair of disciples who are pointedly not among the Twelve. One is named Cleopas and is therefore to be identified as Simeon bar-Cleophas. He is, of course, one of the brothers/Heirs of Jesus, as is James [Mark 6:3]. And then who must his companion be? James himself! His name and Simon's (deferred till Luke 24:34, so as to make him into Simon *Peter*) have been changed because of the factional rivalry between the Heirs and the Twelve. The climactic detail of Jesus being recognized in the act of breaking bread echoes the same gesture in the Gospel according to the Hebrews version, in which the risen Christ calls for bread to break the fast James had sworn not to break till Jesus should rise again. In the Thomas story [John 20:24–29], Jesus appears to a figure who is listed among the Twelve, as we now read it, but it is obvious that he is not one of them, as the narrator has just said Jesus

previously appeared to the Twelve with no hint any of them but Judas Iscariot was absent. Thomas, though subsequently counted as one of the Twelve, is only one of many doublets in that group, his namesake being another of the Pillars, Judas Thomas. And like James in Hebrews, Thomas has made a vow that is satisfied by the appearance of the risen Jesus ("Until I place my hand in his side and my finger in the wounds…").

Given the rapid succession of events involved, it would certainly appear that James' execution was the trigger for Jesus ben Ananias, the mad prophet predicting Jerusalem's demise, to begin his doom-crying. We already knew Origen read a text of Josephus which said the people blamed the fall of Jerusalem on the death of James. It is ironic that Origen piously harrumphs that they should have traced the disaster to the execution of Jesus instead, because, as Theodore J. Weeden has shown beyond reasonable doubt,[20] Mark and John both based their gospel Passion narratives on Josephus' account of Jesus ben Ananias. Eisenman similarly suggests that Mark has replaced Jesus ben Ananias'

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prophecy with one attributed to Jesus Christ, the Olivet Discourse, which was the signal for several of the "Essene" groups, including the church of the Pillars, to flee Jerusalem while they had the chance, leading to their fanning out through Pella to farther fields.

Eisenman's broadest goal is to show how the Greek gospels are products of a Paulinized, Hellenized, completely non-Jewish retrofitting of the tradition. The underlying reality must be speculatively pieced together by comparisons between gospel materials and apparently related texts from the Mishnah and Talmud, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, and Ebionite sources. Very often, all we may find is a series of sets of motifs that seem to have, as he puts it, "reverberated" between documents and traditions, forming very different stories as the motifs gradually combined into various "multicellular organisms" of different sorts. Eisenman spends the first several hundred pages trying to reel in these minnows and to reconstruct the schools of fish they used to swim in.

The most straightforward set of cases cluster about the gospel transformation of stories of neo-Joshua prophets and Samaritan messiahs leading their flocks of four hundred or four thousand or five thousand into the wilderness to witness a miracle which will commence the liberation of

the messianic age. When Jesus is shown multiplying food for such crowds in the wilderness, we certainly have gospel reworkings of these stories originally recounted of Theudas the Magician, the unnamed Egyptian prophet, and the Samaritan messiah whose followers Pilate ambushed on Mount Gerizim. The secondary nature of the gospel versions is evident from the fact that Palestine contained no genuine deserts such as the stories require. But the connection is even more manifest from the fact that John's version pointedly raises the question of whether Jesus should be made king by force—only to dismiss it [6:15]. Thus also Paul is asked whether he is not the Egyptian who led the Sicarri out into the desert [Acts 21:38], to give him the opportunity to deny it.

And remember, "Theudas," as in the Nag Hammadi Apocalypses of James, is another version of Thaddeus. Eisenman also makes Theudas a version of Judas Thomas. Was it he who promised to make Jerusalem's
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walls collapse? As for the Samaritan leader Pilate killed, he must have thought himself the Restorer (*Taheb*), and Eisenman sees a refracted glimmer of this hero when Peter resurrects *Tabitha* in Lydda, all the more since the Samaritan messiah's followers rallied at *Tirathaba*. Speaking of Lydda, Rabbinic tradition tells us of the crucifixion there of a Messiah ben Joseph who was named either *Doetus* or *Dortas* (originally perhaps the messianic *Dositheus* of Samaria), who shows up cross-dressing at Lydda as *Dorcas*, Tabitha's other name [Acts 9:36].

All this represents a bowdlerizing of such rebel-messiah traditions, "cleaned up" for the gospels, *i.e.*, for Gentile consumption. Much less straightforward, which is perhaps why Eisenman takes so incredibly long tying the ends together (and that pretty loosely), is another set of stories sharing DNA, and not necessarily dominant strands. Hang on. First there is the story in Mark 7:24–30 and Matthew 15:21–28 in which a Syro-Phoenician woman (a Gentile) begs a reluctant Jesus to heal her devil-possessed daughter whom she has presumably entrusted to a freaked-out sitter back home. Demon exorcism is the ostensible topic, but the story turns on the issue of dining at table and of the dinner guests' food falling off the table to the dogs. Eisenman implies that the story means to deal not just generally with the Gentile Mission (true enough as far as that goes), but specifically with the issue of Jewish-Christian table fellowship with

Gentiles. The reader is to think of how "what Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, not to God" [1 Cor. 10:20]. But Jesus, allowing that Gentile "dogs" may eat what falls from (Jewish-) Christian tables, seems to resolve the issue in a manner acceptable to the author of 1 Corinthians 10:25: "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience." The Gentile, ex-pagan Christians are the dogs who eat whatever falls from the table, hardly scrupling to give it a sniff.

That would also seem to be the/an underlying issue in Luke's version of the same story, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Here the dogs that greedily devoured crumbs falling off the table in Mark and Matthew have become those who lick the wounds of the skeletal Lazarus, who wishes he might eat the scraps from the rich man's table.
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He has taken the place of both the dogs and the daughter. Luke derives his canines from the dogs who came to the rich man ben Kalba Sabu'a's door but always went away not "*wanting* to be filled" as in Luke's substitution, but rather the opposite: *always* "filled." Especially in view of Scott Morschauser's exegesis of the parable,[21] it is evident that the Gentile taint of the Syro-Phoenician mother has become the Idumaean taint of Dives, since he patently stands for the faux-Jewish scofflaw Herod Antipas. (She has also become the sinful woman in Luke 7:36–50, whom Jesus defends against "Simon the Pharisee," *i.e.*, the historical Simon Peter as depicted in Galatians 2:11*ff* and Acts 10:14.)

Lazarus will meet us again in John 12, at a feast served by his sisters Miriam and Martha, at which Miriam anoints Jesus with perfume, as did the sinful woman of Luke 7. And these two ladies stand for a pair of supremely wealthy daughters in Talmudic tradition. One of these was Miriam, daughter of the rain-maker Nakdimon, the other Martha, daughter of the Sadducee Boethus. Miriam was so spoiled that she required a daily budget of 400 dinarii just for perfume. Whenever she walked to synagogue, her servants laid a path of richly embroidered cushions for her to tread upon so that her dainty feet might never touch the dirty ground. (The cushions were then given to the poor.) The expensive perfume has become that "wasted" upon Jesus (instead of being sold for the poor) by the unnamed woman (implicitly Mary Magdalene) in Mark and Matthew, Luke's "sinful woman," and Mary in John. The cushions have become the

clothing spread in his donkey's path by Jesus' fans on Palm Sunday. Nakdimon is Nicodemus who joins Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus, smearing him in a fantastically huge amount of funereal *perfume* [John 19:39].

The anticipated stench of Lazarus, thought to be dead (or actually dead but soon-to-be-revived), derives from another reek arising from a tale of Johanon ben Zakkai, who made his escape from Jerusalem, being passed through the Roman lines as a corpse in a coffin. To simulate the stench of decomposition, the Rabbi had to carry a mouthful of dung. But, despite the stench, he sprang alive from
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the coffin. The filthy smell reminds us of Paul's reckoning his former, spotless record of Torah-observance as mere dung [Phil. 3:8] when compared to Christian devotion without the law. The latter would be symbolized by the perfume with which Jesus is anointed, and which fills the "house" (*i.e.*, the inhabited world) with the anointer's fame. And of course, unenlightened Jews can be expected to recoil at the sweet savor of gospel preaching as if it were the stench of decomposing flesh [2 Cor.2:14–16]. Again, when we read of Jesus filling the pallid Jewish ablution jars with heady Christian wine in John 2:6–11, we are to think of the many cisterns filled in a time of drought by the rain-making prayers of the hasid Nakdimon. Not bad, but not wine.

Whence the black comedy in Matthew 27:3–10, in which the pious hypocrites of the Sanhedrin, having just delivered the Son of God to death, scruple over what to do with Judas' returned bounty money? Hmmm, they cannot put it back into the treasury, but there's nothing stopping them from putting it toward a cemetery for indigents! Eisenman traces this one to a rabbinic report to the effect that Eliezer ben Hyrcanus approved of a legal opinion ascribed to Jesus that, should a pious Jewish prostitute donate her evening's wages to the temple, they might, instead of being rejected outright, be used to buy a new commode for the High Priest! (Think of Mark 7:18–19, "Whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach and so lands in the toilet, which renders all things clean," as well as 1 Corinthians 6:12–19, which uses the same motifs a bit differently.) Judas Iscariot corresponds to the harlot with her hire, which he casts back into the temple just as she

donated it (implying that she had been paid the same money by the priest whose privy it will now buy—just as it rented her private parts!). And think of John 13:29–30, where Judas leaves to collude with the Sanhedrin and some think he is off to make a holiday contribution to the poor. He *is*, since the money he has received from his evil masters is going to end up paying for a burial place for the poor!

The utter transformation of Jamesian Torah-Christianity into a Gentile mystery religion is epitomized by the subtitle of this book. It represents a Pauline esoteric reinterpretation of the judgment

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language of the Scrolls, paralleled in Revelation 14:9: "Whoever worships the Beast and his statue and allows a mark to be imprinted on his forehead or his hand, he shall choke on the wine of the fury of God, mixed full strength in the cup of his rage!" (*cf*. Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15–16; 49:12; 51:7), plus the Qumran jargon of "the New Covenant in the Land of Damascus." Paul employs a homophonic pun between the Hebrew "*Dam-Chos*," or Blood-Cup (or *Dam-mashek*, "giving blood to drink") and Damascus (the retreat of the James community in the Scrolls). In his communion meal he administers the "New Covenant of the Cup of Blood" of the Christ. He means that anyone who fails to discern this allegorical reference to the saving, sacramental body and blood of Christ and thinks instead only of "Damascus" (as Jamesian Christians would) will wind up drinking of the cup of the wrath of God, the classic fate of the enemies of God.

The New Testament Code enables us to see not only how wholesale a Hellenization overtook Christianity, far beyond anything Harnack ever envisioned, but also the absolute rage of Torah-Christians who understood Paul as Antichrist and apostate. For the first time, they are not made to look like horned villains and sinister opponents of a noble Pauline gospel. Eisenman's monumental work stands as a new milestone in the progress of New Testament research. As much as some might wish it otherwise, we can now never turn back from his revelations, great and small, any more than we dare retreat from the ground gained by Strauss, Baur, and Bultmann. Indeed, it is among the ranks of these scholarly titans that we must now enroll Robert Eisenman.

Mount Tabor[22]

James D. Tabor's book *The Jesus Dynasty[23]* reads too much like those by Baigent, Lincoln, and Leigh.[24] It chronicles the travels, researches, and thought processes of the author, trying to draw the reader along to the finish line. I prefer to have the case set forth in a
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vacuum, built up and defended on its own objective merits. As it is, Tabor's case is a chain of weak links soldered together by supposition, possibility, and "what ifs." Tabor often simply asserts, "I believe that…" That is a matter of hunches, not evidence. What is his basic claim, and upon what evidence does it rest? He believes that Jesus was a would-be king with genuine Davidic credentials, which he inherited from his mother Mary. Jesus' legal father Joseph was of Davidic descent, too, but he descended through King Jeconiah, whose descendants Jeremiah the prophet [22:30] disqualified from ever taking the throne (would that have mattered?). Jesus was actually the son of Mary and of Pandera, perhaps even a particular Tyrian Roman legionary named Adbes Pantera whose tombstone Tabor visited in Germany. Joseph fathered no children and died young. His brother Clophas (a harmonization of two gospel names, Cleophas and Clopas) begat James, Joses, Judas, and Simon with Mary, then died or bowed out of the picture, transferred to Germany, where Tabor saw his monument. But they were all, as per the Levirate marriage custom, considered Joseph's sons and heirs.

Everything is wrong with this. Tabor is willing to take both gospel genealogies as true and historical. That they conspicuously fail to agree is grist for his mill, for like a couple of obscure Catholic apologists,[25] he gratuitously makes the Lukan genealogy the family tree of Mary, even though it plainly says it is the line of Joseph, her husband. He decides that the Jewish jibe that Jesus was the bastard son of the Roman Pandera was true and not a pun on the virgin (*parthenos*) birth claim, just because Pandera was a common name for Roman soldiers, ignoring the fact that even the pun theory requires such, as there wouldn't have been a joke to get unless there were actually men named "Pandera." The hardly reliable Epiphanius tried to co-opt the slur by saying that Pandera was part of the name of an ancestor of Jesus. And that's good enough for Tabor.

Tabor swallows the obvious Lukan fiction of John the Baptizer being Jesus' cousin as a historical fact. He gratuitously posits that "Nazareth" (for which there is no extra-biblical evidence till later in
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the century)[26] is named for being a settlement of many who belonged to the lineage of David, and hence stemmed from the "branch" (*netzer*) of David. This is fantasy. Another Lukan figment he accepts is the trial of Jesus before Herod Antipas. From Mark he absorbs the error of making Herod Antipas woo away the wife of his half-brother Philip. Herodias was actually the wife of Antipas' brother Herod.

He has an interesting discussion of the presence of three different Marys at the tomb [Mark 16], an improbable circumstance, he suggests, even though, as he acknowledges, "Mary" was the most common female name among contemporary Jews.[27] I have many times been in a room with two or three other Bobs, so pardon me if I don't see it as that odd. But the empty tomb narratives are hardly historical reporting anyway. Nonetheless, Tabor reasons that for one of the Marys to be Jesus' mother [John 19:25] and another to have sons named Joses and James [Mark 15:40], names also of the "other" Mary's sons, is too much. So maybe the other Mary is Mary the wife of Clopas [John 19:25]. And maybe she is a fictive doublet of Mary, Jesus' mother, which would explain why "they both" have sons with identical names.[28] This doubling would have resulted from a later attempt to suppress Mary's levirate marriage as somehow unseemly, or perhaps just as a mistake. Tabor notes the fascinating fact that "Cleophas" (and its variant "Alphaeus") come from a root meaning "replacement, substitute." And Tabor says that would fit with this man's having been Joseph's brother standing in for him to beget children for his name. But then are we to suppose that his parents named him because they foresaw his future task? "Cleophas" would be better understood as a subsequent epithet. But who would this man be a substitute for?

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Tabor is building toward the venerable theory of Adolf Harnack[29] and Ethelbert Stauffer[30] (never mentioned in this book) that Jesus was a messianic king, and that in his absence, James, then Simeon his brother, took over as "caliphs" in his place, as Abu-bekr, Umr, and Uthman did

after Muhammad's passing. Tabor even points out how the name "Cleophas" comes from the very same root as "caliph" (Arabic *khalifa*). But I should think Eisenman's approach would make more sense of these intriguing bits. Eisenman realizes none of the narratives of the gospels, and hardly the Nativity stories, preserve any real sequences of events, but that all gospel narratives must be decoded, reflecting, at best, dim echoes and clues of what was really going on. And in this case, surely the "Cleophas/Alphaeus" business must denote that James the Just as the brother of Simeon bar Cleophas (and therefore another "son of Cleophas") barely conceals the fact that James and Simeon were both "Cleophas," the caliph, or stand-in, for Jesus.

Tabor makes James the Just the secret identity of the Beloved Disciple, but how can that be, since John, whose exclusive property the Beloved Disciple character is, makes clear that Jesus' brothers were derisive skeptics [John 7:3–5]? Tabor simply posits that the brothers of Jesus were among the Twelve disciples, so he must discount this verse, as well as Mark 3:31–35. His refutation? Nothing more than to say that, if the brothers were among the Twelve, then scholars have been misreading these passages. Right.

Again, Eisenman sees the link but makes more sense of it: the Twelve were indeed fictive doublets, by and large, of the Pillars, the ostensible "brothers of the Lord." For Eisenman (to whom, by the way, Tabor gives a friendly shout-out in his Acknowledgements, but to whose work he never once refers in the body of the book), these names are islands on the surface, emerging from a vaster, hidden mass below, the outlines of which can still be dimly discerned.
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But Tabor is handicapped by taking way too much of the narrative surface as is.

Tabor makes Luke a Paulinist and imagines that he was not eager to uphold the leadership rights of the Heirs, the relatives of Jesus. But this is a bad misreading of Luke–Acts, where the implication is that the family of Jesus were disciples already before the resurrection (compare Luke 8:19–21 with Mark 3:20–21, 31–35 and see Acts 1:14).

Tabor recaps Strauss's theory that John 3:22–24 attests an interim period in which Jesus acted as an apprentice of John,[31] perhaps even

sharing his baptizing work. (Of course, the casual reader would never guess anyone before Tabor had come up with the theory.) You can decide if that is more plausible than the alternative scholarly guess that Jesus baptizing represents simply an anachronistic retrojection of Christian baptism into the narrative so as to depict the competition between the two emerging sects and to have John give his blessing on the winners [John 3:25–30]. But if Jesus and John the Baptist were indeed colleagues this means they might have conspired together to become the dynamic duo of Qumran saviors, the Priestly and Royal Messiahs. Yes, maybe so. Maybe not. In any case, another old theory. And maybe they derived their revolutionary timetable from Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks.[32] Could be. Who knows? I don't think Tabor does. He is winging it, merely speculating.

There is little or nothing new in this book. It is but a pale ghost of Eisenman's magisterial *James the Brother of Jesus*. It is dedicated to Albert Schweitzer, which is no accident, since it basically recapitulates his theory that Jesus expected he would usher in the apocalypse by his ministry of healing, preaching, and exorcism, but that John the Baptist's shocking death made him reconsider, making him realize for the first time that he might have to die, too, taking the Great Tribulation onto his own shoulders. To this add Hugh J.
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Schonfield's *The Passover Plot*, which Tabor's book greatly resembles in its imaginative mind-reading of Jesus and how he *might have*-cum-*must have* applied various scriptural prophecies to himself, then endeavored to fulfill them.

One might apply Tabor's own words to his book as an epitaph: "It is amazing what firm opinions have been built upon such shaky foundations" [p. 165].

Hyam the Hammer[33]

Jesus the Pharisee[34] one of the last books by the late, great Hyam Maccoby, is typically fascinating. In it the author pursues an agenda familiar from and anticipated in some of his previous work. He aims to separate the historical Jesus from Christianity and to reclaim him for Judaism, hermetically sealing him off from Paul, the real founder of

Christianity, an alien religion that has about as much to do with Judaism as the syncretic Sabazius cult did. And, like a recurring video echo on the screen, we can see an ongoing debate between Maccoby and today's preeminent authority on ancient Judaism, Jacob Neusner. It is to Maccoby's credit that he manages to keep the tone of this latter discussion as cordial and collegial as he reminds us the debates among the rabbis were. Though Maccoby finds various minor bones to pick with Neusner, his major gripe is Neusner's notion that Rabbinical Judaism began with Yavne, not with the first-century Pharisee movement, and that the former merely proof-texted the latter, back-dating various traditions, laws, and quotations into the earlier period in order to claim the prestige of the Pharisees for their own, rather different, enterprise. Instead, Maccoby defends the position that the rabbis were the direct successors of the Pharisees (not that there were no innovations made necessary by changed circumstances), and that Jesus' halakhic positions as recorded in the gospels are so closely parallel to those of the rabbis that he must be considered a prime exemplar of a rabbinical-style Pharisaism that extends back into the first century. As to why the Pharisaic character
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of the historical Jesus has not been evident from the start, Maccoby takes up the theory he has espoused before, basically that of S.G.F. Brandon, that Jesus viewed himself as King Messiah and hoped to bring about the expulsion of the Romans, albeit by precipitating a divine miracle, not by taking up the sword.

Christians saw the failure of the Jewish Revolt, in which they must have participated, and thereafter they transformed their faith in the fallen Jesus into a purely spiritual salvation cult, under heavy (Pauline-brokered) influence from the Mystery Religions. Seeking to avert Roman hostility, which they and their Master had earned, Christians sought to rewrite history, driving a fictitious wedge between Jesus and Judaism (Pharisaism) already in his lifetime, making him a rejector of Torah, the very portrait that has served Protestantism so well ever since. This redefinition of Jesus and Christianity entailed the vilification of the Pharisees, originally Jesus' colleagues, casting them as his deadly enemies. The gospels caricature their positions to the point where Jesus is depicted as espousing the actual views of the Pharisees and arguing against bizarre opinions no real Pharisees, as far as we know, ever held.

This effort to reclaim Jesus for Judaism is part of a larger program by which Maccoby seeks to restore Rabbinic (= Pharisaic) Judaism to the place it used to hold in scholarly reckoning as the mainstream of first-century Judaism. Here again Maccoby clashes with Neusner,[35] who has (with others) made clear that the Pharisees, even if they were the major and most popular Jewish sect, were just that: one Judaism among many. And this despite the cataloguing by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic writers of over a score of Jewish sect names from the early period. Maccoby even resists the conclusions of Jewish scholars who have demonstrated how originally loose-canonical figures like the rain-making hasidim Honi (Onias) the Circle-maker and Hanina ben Dosa were later "rabbinized"[36] (much as Elijah

and Elisha were subsequently domesticated by the Deuteronomist Historian).[37] For Maccoby, even John the Baptist was a Pharisee! Here and elsewhere one detects an apologetical agenda on behalf of Rabbinical Judaism analogous to that of N.T. Wright and Luke Timothy Johnson on behalf of conservative Christianity. Of course, that by itself makes no difference; his arguments must stand or fall on their own, no matter how they happened to occur to him or why.

Maccoby calls attention to what seem to him items of data which go against the general redactional/apologetical tendencies of the Hellenizing, Romanizing gospel writers. These he considers loose ends owing their survival to a napping redactor who failed to notice their inimical implications for the case he sought to make. And that, in itself, is sound critical thinking. His favorite example is the caution of Rabban Gamaliel in Acts 5:34–39, according to which the chief of the Pharisees (though Acts doesn't tell us that) sticks up for the early Jewish Christians, entertaining the possibility that their movement might after all be divinely inspired, so that to persecute them might turn out to be opposing God. Maccoby feels that this scene, left intact by Luke, gives the lie to the notion of a Pharisee hatred of Christianity right from the start. And it also means that Christianity cannot yet have contained doctrinal features later repugnant to Judaism, such as divine incarnation, eucharistic blood-drinking, or Torah-apostasy.

The trouble is that (here and elsewhere) Maccoby is entirely too credulous of the texts that come in handy for him. In this case, any historical value of the scene is completely vitiated by the plain fact that it is borrowed lock, stock, and barrel from literary sources. The summary of previous flash-in-the-pan messiahs (Theudas Magus and Judas the Galilean, in that order) comes right out of a too-hasty reading of Josephus, [38] who discussed the two messiahs in
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reverse order, employing a flashback, which Luke missed. The advice not to persecute the propagators of the new gospel comes straight from Dionysus' warning to Pentheus not to risk opposing God by persecuting Dionysus worship in Thebes, in Euripides' *Bacchae*: "I warn you once again: do not take arms against a god" [lines 789–790].[39] Besides these borrowed elements, there is nothing left. How interesting that Maccoby flatly rejects as a Pauline lie Acts's report that Paul had studied with Gamaliel [Acts 22:3]. Too bad he is not as properly skeptical of the earlier Gamaliel mention.

Maccoby similarly takes as history the altercation in Mark 7 over purity laws, maintaining (quite properly) that Jesus is in fact not shown there "declaring all foods clean," since these words are in any case editorial and should probably be read as referring not to "he," Jesus, "declaring" anything, but rather to the latrine which renders all foods clean in the end. The trouble is, the scene is predicated, as all men know, upon Jesus and Palestinian scribes arguing from the Greek Septuagint, not the Hebrew text of Isaiah. The Hebrew text would not make the point Mark wants his Jesus to make. So the scene cannot very well be a piece of history.

Did Jesus believe himself to be the messiah? Maccoby thinks so. But then what about the insight of Wrede[40] and Bultmann:[41] how could Jesus have taught his messiahship when the early Christian belief in it was only gradual in dawning, replacing an earlier belief that Jesus had become messiah-designate at the ascension,[42] as well as a second stage whereby Jesus officially became the Messiah as of the resurrection?
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How can these stages of belief ever have occurred if Jesus had simply taught (even privately) that he was already the Messiah?

Maccoby is even willing to accept Matthew's amplification of Mark's (already fictive—see Gerd Thiessen)[43] Caesarea Philippi scene in which Jesus bestows vizier-like powers upon Peter, the keys of the kingdom. This will come in handy to explain that Peter was subordinate, in the reckoning of Jesus himself, to James, Jesus' regent in the Jerusalem caliphate. Maccoby needs the structures and beliefs of Jerusalem Christianity to go back to Jesus, not to be merely one of several mutations of Jesus-faith after his death. But he is building upon pretty sandy soil.

In just the same way, Maccoby mounts a doomed argument that Matthew 5:17 and 19 represent an authentic saying of Jesus, who therefore must have envisioned no Pauline-style abrogation of the Torah. Now it is clear that the underlying Q saying Matthew 5:18 (also Luke 16:17) does mean to attribute just such a position to Jesus (whether correctly or not, who knows?). But it seems impossible not to take the adjacent verses as Matthean embellishment. That they cannot go back to Jesus in any case is evident from the fact that verse 17 already knows of a rival *Christian* opinion that Jesus "came to" abolish the scriptures, theological language interpreting the ministry of Jesus, a figure of the past. Jesus cannot have said this.[44]

Matthew 23:1–2, where Jesus urges his disciples to accept all the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, though not to emulate their personal conduct, as they do officially occupy "Moses' seat," falls prey to archaeology, for the Cathedra of Moses was a literal throne in the chancel of the synagogues—of the second century, not the first. But Maccoby ascribes the whole business to Jesus, who therefore must have been an orthodox Pharisee.

Maccoby claims Matthew 9:10–13 as a rare glimpse of Jesus' true regard for his Torah colleagues: if he were to spend his time with
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them he would be like a physician spending all his time at the AMA while neglecting his sick patients. Thus Jesus must have regarded the Pharisees as the "righteous who need no repentance." But why should we assume the Pharisees are in view? What Jesus' critics want to know is why Jesus consorts with a bad element instead of with upstanding folks. Neither they nor he say anything implying the "righteous" are the Pharisees.

In order to salvage such friendly but dubious texts from the cutting-room floor, Maccoby proposes to go John Dominic Crossan one better and to extend the latter's criterion of multiple attestation, in other words, to make the holes in the net wider so more fish can make it through. In company with other form-critics, Crossan had proposed accepting the authenticity of any saying that was to be found in two or three unrelated early Christian sources, say Mark and Q. Maccoby says that we ought to include sayings that appear even in related sources, like all three Synoptics. Why? Apparently because Matthew and Luke could have edited a Markan saying had they wanted to, and the fact that they left it alone must mean they set their imprimatur on it. But this is to misunderstand the nature of redaction criticism. All it means for Matthew and Luke to have left Mark alone is that they did not see the Markan material as undermining the new emphases they wanted to add. It has nothing to do one way or the other with how accurate a reporter Mark was.

Maccoby rightly sees in the gospels a polemic against the Pillars/Heirs of Jesus and the Jerusalem Christianity they headed. He echoes F.C. Baur[45] (whom otherwise he excoriates), Ernst Käsemann, [46] and Oscar Cullmann[47] in seeing the significance of the fact that the Sanhedrin persecution of Hellenistic Stephen-Christianity left the Twelve unmolested [Acts 8:1]. Surely this means that there were two very different kinds of Christianity struggling in the Jerusalem womb,

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and that the Sanhedrin saw nothing particularly objectionable in that headed by the Twelve. But Maccoby dismisses as absurd Baur's conjecture that Jerusalem Christianity had "re-Judaized" the more radical, less nationalist, Torah-indifferent gospel of the historical Jesus. It seems obvious to Maccoby that if Jesus' own brothers (James the Just and, after him, Simeon bar Cleophas) led the Jerusalem faction, aided by the Twelve, their version of the faith must stem from Jesus himself. And that does make sense on the surface. But one ought not neglect possible historical analogies to the development as Baur pictured it. For instance, the eighteenth-century Hasidic movement begun by the Baal Shem Tov was at first anti-legalistic, disdaining the letter in favor of the Spirit. They denounced what they perceived as fossilized rabbinical orthodoxy. But it was not long before they shed this radicalism and became some of the

most zealous students of Torah and Talmud. It is natural to understand Jesus this way, as Geza Vermes[48] and others do. Suppose he was like the Galilean hasids who performed miracles and yet sat loose to the niceties of the Law, for which laxity they received scorn from the Pharisees. Not coincidentally, Maccoby has already challenged Vermes's reconstruction of the hasids as a possible precedent for a non-legalistic Jesus. It is a strategic move, eliminating a dangerous chess piece from the board before one's opponent can use it.

Also, one might posit that the very same survival instinct evidenced in the Pauline/Markan Christian attempt to Romanize Christianity in order to avert Roman persecution had earlier led to Jewish Christians jettisoning the radicalism of Jesus in order to buy the very toleration by the Sanhedrin that Maccoby rightly indicates that they enjoyed.

There is another thought-provoking parallel farther afield. I am thinking of what happened in India in the aftermath of the Upanishadic revelation. Kshatriya sages, weary of the ritual formalism and the caste domination of the priestly Brahmin elite, sought the solitude of the forests to meditate. Looking within, they realized the invisible power thought to reside in the Vedic rituals performed by the priests, a power called the Brahman, was instead located in the
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innermost self, the *atman*, of every sentient being. The only requisite 'sacrifice' was that of the introspective heart. This conclusion would seem to have rendered the whole Vedic system obsolete, and so most of the priests opposed it. But some Brahmins liked what they heard, and they decided it must actually constitute the esoteric truth of the Vedas, not a repudiation of them. So, while many Kshatriyas, like the Buddha and Mahavira, flatly rejected the Vedic scriptures and rituals, and most Brahmins rejected the Kshatriya heresy, there were some Brahmins who 're-Vedicized' the new doctrine, writing massive commentaries (Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads) on the Vedas, expounding them in accord with the new revelation, actually filling the old skins with new wine and holding them together as best they could.[49] Is that not how Mark 2:18, 21–22 sees the matter? Not that it's necessarily correct.

Maccoby rejects another Judaism-Hinduism parallel that has become practically an axiom of Politically Correct Jesus scholarship over

the last couple of decades. Many have grossly misconstrued the notion of Jewish purity laws as if they established socio-economic caste divisions within Jewish society in Jesus' day. The gospel 'sinners' were, we are often told, whole professional classes whose members were stuck in a perpetual state of ritual uncleanness because their work involved constant contact with the dead, with wounds, animal carcasses, *etc.* As a result, the historical Jesus can be depicted as a first-century Gandhi, seeking out the Shudras and the Untouchables and declaring them *harijans*, children of God. This, for instance, is the party-line view of Jesus propagated by television documentaries and the talking heads they interview. Jesus as Dr. King. One hesitates to say it, but it looks like Liberal Protestantism, unsatisfied with a Jesus who is a relic of ancient concerns and debates, is remodeling Jesus after modern heroes whom they would really prefer. In short, they do not make Gandhi and Dr. King into Christ figures, but rather they make Jesus into a Gandhi figure or a King figure. Maybe they should just be up front about it and set up a new religion based on the Mahatma and Dr. King. Many of us would join up.

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Maccoby is right: what these perilous modernizers of Jesus miss is that purity laws did not forbid all acts incurring impurity. Instead, they took for granted that many needful acts regularly incurred ritual impurity and stipulated what to do to negate it, sometimes washing your hands, sometimes just waiting till sundown, *etc.* Undertakers might find themselves 'unclean' more of the time than other folks, but it was absolutely necessary, and a major charitable act, to wash and bury the dead. And to recognize this obvious fact (at least it *should* have been obvious)[50] is to stultify all those chic interpretations that Jesus was courageously and radically reversing contemporary norms when he allowed lepers or menstruating women to touch him. As Maccoby says, no such issues are mentioned in the narrative. They have to be read in by modern exegetes who sometimes seem to know *too* much about the background of this or that pericope. The gospel writers seem to be unaware of such factors, either because we have got the facts wrong, or *they* did, writing far away from the Palestine of the first third of the first century CE..

At first Maccoby himself seems to fall victim to the same error when he discusses Jesus' defense of his disciples' gleaning on the Sabbath [Mark 2:23–26] by an appeal to the scriptural precedent of David, on the run from Saul, feeding his famished men with the reserved sacrament [1 Sam. 21:1–6]. Maccoby notes the silliness of the reply if all Jesus was defending was his disciples' convenience. The Davidic case would be relevant only if they were in danger of *starving*. So maybe they *were*: perhaps the story silently presupposes that Jesus and his lieutenants are on the run from a persecuting Herod, their lives in danger as rebels, just like David and his men. At first one thinks: Maccoby is reading in a concern of which the text seems innocent. But no. What he is doing is applying to a puzzling narrative a paradigm which has proven quite productive in solving other such puzzles. Suppose the narrative, which makes little sense as it stands, is missing something that would make sense of it, but which would be too dangerous to say aloud. On the Brandon hypothesis, we can readily imagine the censoring of precisely this element of explanation: Jesus

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and his men were in genuine need because of political persecution, the kind he is now in retrospect never supposed to have undergone. It is one of Maccoby's many fresh insights. However, one still needs to take into consideration Bultmann's insight[51] that the text shows scribes questioning and Jesus defending the actions *not of Jesus but of his disciples*, *i.e.*, of early Christians, and that this implies the pericope, together with the issue itself, arose post-Jesus. It is not evidence for the historical Jesus after all.

I have already called attention to Maccoby's twin goals of defending Rabbinic Judaism as the direct continuation of Pharisaism and of establishing Jesus as a typical first-century Pharisee. For both purposes he needs to discount Neusner's argument, confessedly learned from Bultmann, that one cannot trust rabbinical/redactional ascriptions of oft-recurring sayings to any particular name.[52] If a saying is ascribed to Rabbi A in this document but to Abba B in that one, we must approach the ascriptions synchronically, not diachronically. What function does a particular ascription serve in the document in which we find it? Presumably there will be different purposes behind different attributions. And neither will necessarily be merely one of historical inquiry. Maccoby

does not like this kind of talk [p. 209]. For him, attributions must be taken seriously, and this means the traditions of the rabbis are rooted squarely in the soil of first-century Pharisaism. Yet Maccoby feels free to disregard rabbinical ascriptions when he reasons that, if a Jesus parable sounds like a rabbinical parable first attributed to a rabbi living centuries after Jesus, it may yet be much older, already available for Jesus to have borrowed. (Jeremias thought the same thing.)[53] Sure, a parable may first appear in a later rabbinic source, but that only means that the disciple attributed the parable to the master from whom he had
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initially heard it, not that he has ascribed it to its actual originator [p. 93]. But doesn't this land Maccoby in a fatal contradiction? Surely, given the tradition-oriented character of rabbinical learning, a disciple would have heard the parable (or other saying) *as attributed to its ostensible originator*. His own master would have said, "Rabbi So-and-so used to say…" If, then, a saying or parable meets us attributed first to a later figure, we have no right to back-date it to Jesus' day. Rather, we must take the rabbinical parable as the source of the gospel parable (provided the gospel version appears to be later, *e.g.*, garbled) and *admit it is anachronistic for Jesus*. And remember, we have no right to date the gospel version as older than the earliest manuscript or patristic citation in which we find it.

Neusner, then, suggests that sayings which originated later have been retrojected into the mouths of more ancient sages, to give the sayings added antiquity and authority. He infers this, I think, from the fact that, were the saying known to stem from the earlier author, we would never find it attributed also to a later one. If it were known to have come from first-century Rabbi A, who would ever have ascribed it instead to the less authoritative because more recent Abba B? This seems sound critical thinking to me. And thus Maccoby is not merely inconsistent but wrong as well. The Maccoby who implicitly agrees with Neusner that an attribution to an earlier source (*e.g.*, to Jesus) as its originator may be fictive is right. The Maccoby who rejects the same Neusner axiom (when it comes to first century Pharisees) is wrong.

Throughout the book one anticipates seeing Maccoby say something about an earlier book with the same title, *Jesus the Pharisee* by

Harvey Falk,[54] who argued pretty much the same case. In fact, Maccoby for some reason never mentions him by name, though he does at length reject an important piece of Falk's argument. Like Falk, Maccoby is busy demonstrating that virtually every halakhic judgment ascribed to Jesus in the gospels is attested also for more or less contemporary Pharisees. Where they differ is that Falk sees Jesus being depicted as a liberal rabbi in the tradition of Abba Hillel,
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pursuing a policy of leniency that brought him into fatal collision with the Pharisees of Shammai's more severe faction. Maccoby, on the other hand, points out that the gulf between the factions of Hillel and Shammai was not that wide, and that, at least on divorce, Jesus is shown as closer to Shammai than to the easy-going Hillel.

Maccoby seems to step beyond all possible evidence and to betray the wishful character of his project when he gratuitously asserts that John and Jesus "were regarded by the Pharisees as well-meaning, loyal, and breathtakingly courageous Jews, making claims that had an honored place in tradition and would someday be fulfilled, even if the present claimants, like so many before them, turned out to be disappointments" [p. 66]. Here we have supposition made into fact, the same process by which the fictive gospel tradition grew in ancient times. Not only that, but we also have a prime case of the very "re-Judaization" process against which Maccoby himself rails.

Essene Essence[55]

Early in her book, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls*,[56] Barbara Thiering presents us, matter-of-factly, this scenario: Rabbi Hillel had introduced a baptism of repentance for both Jews and Gentiles. For the former the rite represented a recommitment to the Law, while for the latter immersion denoted proselyte conversion. This crusade was turned by Menahem the Diaspora Essene and founder of the Magi, an Essene faction keeping the solar calendar, into a great missionary movement with a theocratic coloring. Menahem's ally Herod the Great was destined to usher in the Millennium, taking advantage of the Jewish and Judaizing power-base built up through the mission. Each convert would be presented a sacred white stone engraved with a secret cultic name, in return for which

he would pay an initiation fee. This would go to Herod to finance his many building projects. In the final denouement, Herod would rule a
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great Jewish empire, and beneath him would reign a triumvirate of 'Abraham' (successors to Hillel), 'Isaac' (successors to Menahem, Zadokite priests to rule the Eastern half of the empire), and 'Jacob' (the Davidic messianic heir, to rule the West, including Rome). The first in line to play the role of 'Jacob' was Heli, the father of Joseph, who became the father of Jesus. Joseph became a freedom fighter allied with Acts's Theudas. Eventually the Herodian enterprise gave rise to numerous Essene and Zealot schisms, each with claimants to the 'Pope' (='Abraham'),[57] Prophet, and King roles.

One reads these pages and first wonders if one has forgotten a good deal of one's Josephus. Where has Dr. Thiering derived these facts? The answer is that she has developed a method for reading beneath the narrative surface of the gospels with clues provided by the Dead Sea Scrolls. Indeed, it soon develops that virtually every gospel event transpired not at Jerusalem, Nazareth, or Bethany, but rather at Qumran and its environs. It seems that when one group of Essenes temporarily estranged from Herod fled to Qumran, they deemed their holy compound the New Jerusalem. Various out buildings and nearby locations were dubbed 'Bethany,' 'Bethlehem,' *etc.*, either because of their analogous relative positions or because they were the reserved lodgings of the Essene dignitaries who visited from their dioceses in the real Galilee, Gerasa, *etc.*

It is evident that, while Dr. Thiering accepts a first-century *Sitz-im-Leben* for the Scrolls, she is unmoved by the arguments of Norman Golb[58] and others that Qumran was not a monastery and may have been merely one of many places the Scrolls were stored on the eve of the fall of Jerusalem. Indeed, it is a central requirement of her reconstruction that Qumran be not only a monastery, but even the center of all sectarian activity in the time of Jesus, including that of Jesus himself.

More revelations are in store. We discover that in the code in which the gospels are written certain historical individuals hide
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beneath several different names and epithets, sometimes even under the titles 'God' and 'the Holy Spirit.' For instance, Simon Magus turns out to

be none other than Simon the Zealot and Lazarus (whose resurrection was really his restoration from excommunication). Martha, Sapphira, Herodias' daughter Salome, Joanna, and the Samaritan woman are all alternate names for Helena, the consort of Simon Magus.

Stephen was 'martyred' in the sense, again, of being excommunicated and deprived of his priestly position. Priestly? Yes, for he was really Annas the high priest! He was also one of the Twelve, James of Alphaeus, Nathaniel, and the Samaritan Dositheus! Not only so, but it was Annas who played the role of Elijah at the Transfiguration. Thomas was, we read, Herod, the first husband of Herodias. John Mark was the Beloved Disciple and also Eutychus [Acts 20:9]. Thaddaeus was the Theudas of Acts 5:36 as well as Barabbas.

According to Theiring, almost every event in the gospels is a veiled reference to posturing, politics, and jockeying for position in the variegated Messianic Essene kaleidoscope of first-century Palestine. The Transfiguration, for instance, was simply an abortive bid by Jesus to assume priestly dignity on top of his royal prerogative. It failed, because the Heavenly Voice (Simon Magus) endorsed the Son (Annas) instead. For Jesus to change water into wine involved nothing miraculous but instead denoted that he opened full initiation to novices, who had hitherto been barred from drinking the sacramental wine at the Community Meal. By trying to make initiation easier Jesus earned the epithet 'the Wicked Priest,' a seeker after smooth things.

Jesus was crucified with Theudas and Simon Magus but was taken down alive from the cross. Herod Antipas had prevailed upon Pilate to change the form of execution over to being buried alive, thus the entombment. But the Therapeutae (here understood as Essene healers) managed to revive Jesus. Jesus supervised the writing of the gospels, the first of which, John's, was written by 37 AD. He lived mainly in seclusion but from time to time emerged from hiding to

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appear to his disciples. He even accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys (the "we" in Acts denotes Jesus' presence along with Luke, who by the way is also Cornelius). He met Peter on the latter's way out of Rome, asking him "Quo vadis?" Jesus himself probably died of old age in

Rome. He was survived by a son, Jesus Justus, and a daughter, Damaris, who changed her name to Phoebe after she married the Apostle Paul.

Under the auspices of what conceivable hermeneutic may such results be pressed from the text of the New Testament? Dr. Thiering launches her bold voyagings from one fundamental postulate: those who read sacred texts according to the pesher method[59] would be likely, were they to write scriptures of their own, to write them in such a way as to make them rightly understood only by the same technique [p. 22]. Thus we ought to expect to find an exoteric layer and an esoteric layer. She is mapping out the esoteric layer with the aid of hints from the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as chronological clues provided by contemporary calendrical speculations.

To Dr. Thiering's operative premise several weighty objections may be leveled. First, it seems gratuitous to assume that any New Testament writers viewed themselves as writing scripture. Second, it is not clear that they would have thought contemporary writings, especially their own, to be amenable to the special methods of sacred hermeneutics. The rabbis, as recent studies have shown, continued to make use of poetic paraphrastic parallelism in their own writings even though they took parallels in the text of scripture literally, as when Matthew makes Jesus ride two donkeys into Jerusalem because of his over-literal reading of Zechariah 9:9. They did not over-literalize poetic parallels in contemporary writings.

Third, Thiering characterizes the approach of the pesher technique as being just the reverse of allegory: if allegory makes specifics in the text into universals (*e.g.*, for Philo, Abraham stands for the rational faculty), pesher seeks out specifics behind universal

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types in scripture. For instance, "the righteous man" in this or that passage refers to the Teacher of Righteousness. But this hardly describes what she does with the text of the gospels. Instead, she usually makes one specific stand for another. And while Qumran pesher exegesis attempted to read known historical events into scriptural texts in order to invest those events with the significance of prophetic predestination, Thiering is doing something very different: she is reconstructing wholly unknown and unsuspected events from the text. In the one case we are working from the known to the known, in the other from the known to the unknown.

Fourth, she reads into the text a rationalist tendency alien to the ancient world but quite amenable to ours. The "basic assumption" of "the pesher method" "is that nothing supernatural took place" [p. 116]. The surface level is, she says, laden with myth and miracle for the sake of the babes in Christ who need these props for their faith, and to keep outsiders outside. Yet according to Thiering's own reading, the sense given by the exoteric reading surely reverses the "real," esoteric meaning at every point. Since when is catechism for the simple to be equated with hiding the truth from them? What she really seems to envision is a strategy like that used in the Apocalypse, where the meaning is purposely obscured for hostile readers who might somehow get a look at the book. But what Thiering says is a harsher thing, as it entails writing off the traditional reading as a tissue of intentional obfuscations.

And, fifth, we must object that, even should there be an esoteric message available to the insiders, Dr. Thiering herself is an outsider like us. She can produce no Rosetta Stone to use as a key to the text. When she pauses to note "This is not conjecture, but comes from a reading of the text by the pesher method" [p. 116], we can only ask, "What's the difference?" "Without venturing too far into speculation," she says [p. 89], she thinks to impart the real history of the Messiah Jesus, spinning out an esoteric epic with the apodictic certainty of a Rudolf Steiner.

This book, for all its clothing in the tatters of the Qumran Scrolls, represents the classic Essene hypothesis of Jesus: he was an Essene
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or a rebel Essene, and the gospel story can be rationalized with reference to Essene healing techniques and rituals mistaken for miracles. The resurrection of Jesus was simply the reappearance of a Jesus who survived the crucifixion thanks to Essene ministrations. The Essene theory, as Albert Schweitzer and others have described it, was one species of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Rationalism. It seemed to provide a way of vindicating the gospel narrative without admitting miracles.

In fact, as Strauss[60] showed, the Rationalists were just as zealous in their championing of scriptural inerrancy as were the orthodox. They were non-supernaturalist inerrantists, firmly committed to 'saving the appearances,' notably the resurrection appearances. In an age of science, they reasoned that to admit the presence of miracles in the gospels was to

surrender them to the debunkers. In the same way, Dr. Thiering several times dismisses what she perceives to be the negative approach of conventional critics. “A further unexpected point is that the gospels can be fully harmonised. They have been long regarded by scholars, looking at their surface sense, as giving different stories, and in no chronological order except for the passion narrative... When the pesher of the stories is understood, it is seen that there are no differences between them. A doctrine of the inerrancy of scripture becomes a useful working hypothesis!” [p. 179].

It is a time for searching reexamination of the Scrolls and their implications for early Christianity and the life of Jesus. We can only be grateful to Barbara Thiering for making such an attempt. Though many will feel, as I do, that they cannot accept most of her suggestions, one must not consign them all to a premature grave. For instance, the notion that the Samaritan woman is meant as a cipher for the Simonian Helena ought not to be dismissed out of hand, given the Christian-Samaritan polemical context in which scholars have long placed the passage [John 4].

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Certainly the surprising proposal that the Teacher of Righteousness was John the Baptist (already the suggestion of Robert Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist,* who made the link on the basis of the single Scroll available to him, the Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Covenant) should be taken as seriously as one is willing to take Eisenman’s identification of the Teacher with James the Just. We have for a long time taken for granted that John had some Qumran affinity and that Jesus had broken with John’s sect’s penitential strictness, even that the two sects continued side by side for some time. How far does Thiering’s proposal go beyond these tenets of critical consensus?

Finally, though the very boldness of Thiering’s reconstruction will cause some to dismiss it at once without further consideration such as I have sought to supply here, it ought instead to be recognized as a symptom of a fresh vigor in the field of New Testament criticism. Thiering is willing to put cherished paradigms on the shelf and try something altogether new. As Paul Feyerabend has said, “The only principle that does not inhibit progress is: anything goes.”[61]

The Little Horn[62]

Author, film maker and documentarian Lena Einhorn aims her *The Jesus Mystery: Astonishing Clues to the True Identities of Jesus and Paul[63]* at the intelligent general reader, much the same audience she addresses in her television projects. For that reason, the specialist will be able to skim a good bit of her book. Quite a lot of it is a running start. No criticism meant. But let's cut to the chase. The secret of the true identities of Jesus and Paul is that they are identical to one another. Paul as Tyler Durden. I am Jack's resurrected persona.

Jesus is the Talmudic character Ben Stada, just as most Talmudic authorities surmise. Both are said to have emerged from Egypt
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carrying magic sigils inscribed in their flesh. Jesus is also said in the *Toledoth Jeschu* to have hidden a paper note containing the magically potent Tetragammaton beneath a flap of his flesh. Others have theorized that Ben Stada is the Egyptian messiah mentioned by both Josephus [*Jewish War* 2:13.5; *Jewish Antiquities* 20:8:6] and Acts. According to Einhorn, both guesses are correct. Paul is *rightly* taken for him in Acts 21:38, because Paul was Jesus was the Egyptian was Ben Stada. Along the same lines, John the Baptist was in realty the same man as Theudas the Magician. Both are linked to the Jordan, and both were beheaded by the authorities. In the gospels and Acts, the historical events have been retrojected to an earlier decade.

Einhorn opts for the Swoon Theory, noting that it is by no means ridiculous despite the uneasy assurances of apologists. She regards Jesus as a Zealot crucified alongside fellow Zealots ('thieves,' *lestoi*). After his escape from the cross, he went elsewhere preaching a new gospel concerning the true meaning of the resurrection he had just undergone. So the Proclaimer became the Proclaimed—as well as the Proclaimer of the Proclaimed!

Einhorn thus makes sense of the extensive parallels between the Passion journeys of both Jesus and Paul in Luke-Acts, not that it all happened twice, but that the second telling of the story in Paul's case is a hint that Paul is the same character who underwent the process in Luke. Einhorn notes other, smaller parallels including the Galilean birthplace of

Paul according to Jerome and the similarity of Paul's being trained as a youth by Gamaliel and Jesus engaged in dialectic with the elders and scribes in the temple at age 12. She suggests that Pilate's uncharacteristic urgency to have Jesus acquitted might be explained as another version of Acts 22:25–29, in which the Roman official, about to flog Paul, stands down when he discovers the object of his wrath is a Roman citizen. The Talmud says, cryptically, that Jesus, too, had some connection with the government.

It is a fascinating, albeit speculative thesis. The sheer novelty of it ought not to count against it, though most will laugh it off for no better reason. It is good that Lena Einhorn has contributed her theory to the debate.

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Jesus Didn't Exist but Somebody Did[64]

Luigi Cascioli's *The Fable of Christ: Book of Accusation*[65] briefly claimed public notice through news reports of a lawsuit its author brought against the Roman Catholic Church (actually, a local priest, as synecdoche for the whole Church), accusing them of perpetrating fraud. Cascioli took Catholicism to task for imposture in their use of a mythical figure, one Jesus Christ, to support their claims, bamboozling the faithful with a theological boogeyman who had never really existed. The case did not seem to Italian courts to possess much merit, but a European Union Humanities court announced they would consider whether or not to take the case. Nothing came of it, and Mr. Cascioli died. The case was frivolous: even if one could prove that Jesus Christ never existed, there is no reason whatever to believe the leaders of the Catholic Church share that opinion or see themselves as bilking the faithful. (Molesting them, of course, is another matter.) But our business here is to address the "irrefutable proof" Cascioli's book claims to offer for its hypothesis that Jesus *as such* never existed, though he was closely modeled upon a nearly forgotten historical individual, John of Gamala, firstborn son and heir to the revolutionary Zealot Judas of Galilee.

Luigi Cascioli was quite literally a 'village atheist,' and his book is laced with the vitriol one might expect from such a local gadfly. His tone of sarcastic disgust with the whole biblical tradition and its admirers does not offend me, as I am something of a connoisseur of florid invective as an

antique form of rhetoric. I reckon that, if one can stand the smothering piety of the tone of many overtly Christian works on the Bible and yet find them worth reading, one ought to find their anti-Christian counterpart no more daunting. But the village atheist character of the book and its polemic also makes one fear for the quality of scholarship therein. It is quite common for self-educated scholars, even when they are deeply self-educated, to suffer from idiosyncrasies and blind spots, especially the inability to
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tell historical reconstruction from wild speculation. And these fears are realized in the case of *The Fable of Christ*.

The learned Cascioli spends many chapters getting a running start, arguing that the Old Testament history is largely fictive and is designed to further the theocratic, nationalistic imperialistic aims of Jews, for whom he seems to bear no love. For him, the Bible is something like *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, a mythic manifesto of nationalistic megalomania. (Not that it is inherently unlikely for there to be such world-beating cabals of dangerous lunatics, as witness today's Islamo-Fascists. It's just that Jews never did it.) He is very interested in the Hasmonean campaign against the Seleucids and the revolutionary trajectory Judas Maccabeus and his brothers began. He envisions a uniquely Messianic period between 6 BCE, with the tax revolt of Judas of Galilee, and 70 CE, the Jewish War with Rome, though he quickly extends it to 136 CE, the defeat of Simon bar Kochba. Problems not only of interpretation but even of factual assertion begin to crop up even here. Cascioli confuses Herod Antipas with Herod Agrippa at one point, not that it matters much in the context. Worse, he asserts that the Hasmoneans were direct descendents of the Davidic dynasty. But of course the Hasmoneans labored under the handicap of being Levites, not Davidic Judeans.

Cascioli tantalizes and frustrates with a whole series of assertions about the ancient Mystery Religions and their supposedly exact analogies to Christian passion and resurrection mythologies. Was Marduk arrested, Mithras crucified on a pole? Had Mithras given his own Sermon on the Mount? Cascioli offers not one bit of documentation for any of this. One may be forgiven for wondering if he is recycling hackneyed myths from

previous pseudo-scholarly polemicists. He is either impatient with or oblivious of the distinction between Mithraism and its evolutionary ancestor, Zoroastrianism, making the latter the official religion of Rome in early Christian times. And, while there was no doubt very significant Zoroastrian-to-Jewish influence, Cascioli indulges in sheer speculation when it comes to Christian-era Jewish borrowing from what we should recognize as Mithraism. For Cascioli, all Mystery Religions offered
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mythic *Soters* (saviors) who had preached a doctrine and then been persecuted and martyred for it, only to rise again.

The Christian Jesus Christ, he says, was an intentional fabrication in the mid-second century CE by revolutionary Essenes. The Essenes were not pacifists, but only pretended to be in order to evade Roman persecution, though the Qumran War Scroll tells us their true feelings. That is possible, and there is renewed controversy over who the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls were. But it is a bit odd to interpret the chief, public tenets of a sect as a mere smokescreen by people who believed the opposite. That is a peculiar way to read evidence, it seems to me.

Anyway, the Essenes realized they needed not only the hope of a coming Messiah who had never been on earth, but the figurehead, albeit artificial, of a returning savior who had already won men to his cause, died, and risen. But they knew, did these Madison Avenue Savior designers, that no one would fall for a Christ of pure fancy and imagination. They had to hang him on an appropriate figure of the recent past, one moreover, from their own violent, nationalistic tradition. They fastened upon John of Gamala, son of Judas the Galilean/Gaulonite. Why? He was a revolutionist in good standing, and, unlike the rest, he had been a preacher, too. (Why not his father? Wasn't he, too, a rabbi?). To this hypothetical Jesus-like John, Cascioli ascribes various gospel sayings, sometimes with a twist of rewording. John-Jesus even did 'miracles,' tricks learned from Indian fakirs, including apparent resurrections. So Cascioli is going a good deal farther than he first seemed to do; he is contending that 'Jesus' was actually a glorification of John of Gamala, not just a handy peg on which to hang the messianic halo. The name *John* survives in the tradition, applied instead to the Son of Zebedee, whose

name was originally Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, therefore the Beloved Disciple (as many hold).[66]

Cascioli posits a schism among his Essenes. Those Essenes who had converted from pagan Mystery Religions (and he thinks
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there were many) believed that their new Christ had to have been incarnated, like the other Mystery *Soters*. Other Essenes preferred docetism. Still others believed that, though Jesus had manifested himself (*e.g.*, in visions), he had never come to earth as a man. Such a view, Cascioli says, underlies Galatians 1:1, where Paul says he had learned his doctrine from no man—which must have included Jesus, who therefore must have been a purely heavenly being! Jezebel and the Nicolaitans [Revelation 2:6, 15, 20] must have upheld a fleshly, incarnate Jesus. Huh? Mr. Cascioli says he is presenting "irrefutable evidence" for all this, but I'd be satisfied with any evidence at all.

Cascioli does not merely fill the space between bricks of evidence with the Elmer's Glue of speculation; he makes bricks without the straw of evidence at all. The heart of the theory is the speculative part. The whole thing seems completely arbitrary. It is not that the resultant scenario is inherently silly or absurd. But what reason is there to think it happened? He is essentially positing a cult of John of Gamala as a slain messiah destined to return in glory. That is nothing unparalleled, but why believe it happened in this case?

Cascioli's inerrancy is again debunked when he gets to Marcion. He imagines that Marcion himself penned the Book of Acts, an absolute impossibility, given the plainly anti-Marcionite tenor and *raison d ẽtre* of the writing.[67]

Marcion, Cascioli says, bribed the Roman church into accepting his docetic doctrine with his gift of 200, 000 sesterces—uh, doesn't Cascioli know that the church returned the money and sent Marcion packing?

Was Irenaeus one of the authors of the Gospel of John? Interesting speculation, but that's about it.

Is it true that "the gospels we have now are the revised and corrected versions which came out in the sixth century" [p. 157]? The *sixth* century?

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Cascioli seems to think the Veronica's Veil episode belongs to the gospels [p. 162].[68]

He quotes what one would have to call "apocryphal apocryphal gospels" I've never heard of: Hebrew Gospels 8:57 (**"**How can you know these things if you are not fifty years old yet?"—of course he means John's gospel.). *Ditto* for what he calls the "Pseudogospel of John" which he says tells us that: "Christ had begun his activity at the age of 46" [p. 160]. And there is more, and worse.

Cascioli offers a number of arresting ideas, conjectures, and new interpretations of familiar passages. The book is worth reading, certainly. But it is an interesting failure.

Channeling the Son of God[69]

It helps sometimes to stand back and take a second look at something that is puzzling. Is it possible one has been missing the obvious? That is the question which innovative New Testament scholar Stevan L. Davies poses in *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance and the Origins of Christianity*. What is the puzzle? Simply that, while scholars are agreed that Jesus of Nazareth was a teacher, they can by no means agree on what it is he taught. Of course part of the answer is that many other voices speak in Jesus' name in the gospels. The solution would seem, and for many generations now has seemed, to be to weed out the spurious Jesus-hadith and to start afresh with what is left. But scholarly estimates of the resultant *Quelle* vary and are interpreted through widely different categories. Why should this be? Davies wonders whether the problem is that scholars have started off on the wrong foot. Maybe Jesus wasn't a teacher. Yes, to be sure, he probably made some memorable statements, and these have been preserved amid other, secondary materials, but even the core material turns out not to be so *very* unique (as many recent collations of gospel

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sayings with rabbinical and Hellenistic counterparts have made clear). Maybe Jesus owed his fame to something that interests us less than it did the ancients, something that even embarrasses us: his success as an

exorcist and as a spirit-possessed oracle. Davies brings to bear on the question a battery of anthropological and psychotherapeutic sources and wisely reminds us that, while historical-critical method forbids us to grant probability to supernatural causation claims, it demands that we give credence to reports that the ancients acted like ancients and not like us. To wit: they believed in spirit possession, both divine and demonic. In Davies's estimation, we must grant to the historical Jesus the central role as exorcist and trance medium that the gospels assign him.

The strength of Davies's hypothesis is the surprising sense it would make of several pieces of the scholarly puzzle and of gospel evidence. Let us suppose Jesus would intermittently assume an alternate persona, that of the Spirit or Son of God. This channeled entity (a divine being by ancient reckoning, a piece of his subconscious by modern) would then enable Jesus to perform faith healings and exorcisms (often the same thing anyway). It is surely significant that (except for actual resuscitations of the dead, which may have been coma cures or exaggerations of such) *every* type of healing attributed to Jesus appears among common psychogenic symptoms ("hysterical conversion disorders") in modern diagnostic manuals. This implies that the theatrics of Jesus in his possessed state were enough to jolt the afflicted back out of their psychosomatic condition. The same holds true of demon possession cases even today, where exorcism works simply because possession is a role-playing psychodrama which includes a predictable denouement: Father Marin must sooner or later arrive, and then it's time for Pazuzu to pack his bags and leave.

Surprisingly, though eczema and psoriasis (biblical 'leprosy') are also notoriously psychogenic, Davies keeps company with John Dominic Crossan and Barbara Thiering in rationalizing Jesus' skin healings: Jesus was simply a health inspector, verifying whether or not people's skin rashes had sufficiently cleared up for them to be blessed by the official priests.

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Davies infers, by modern analogy, which is just what historical criticism always does, that demoniacs were reacting to conflicted family situations, the same sort of dysfunction that in our society leads to Multiple Personality Disorder. How did Jesus manage to cure these people,

that is, for good, so that the demon wouldn't come back with seven of his drinking buddies to find the vacant psyche swept and tidy? He must have told them to leave family and home behind and follow him; that is, he extricated the delivered demoniacs from their abusive families and admitted them to his own entourage as members of a new spiritual family, which is of course just what the gospels picture him doing. Mary Magdalene, rid of seven demons, joined Jesus, and the Gerasene demoniac wanted to, but there wasn't enough room in the boat. So far, chalk up some points for Davies: he has connected some dots that otherwise seem to have precious little to connect them. On the one hand, Jesus cured demoniacs; on the other, he broke up families; now we can perhaps see why he did both. (But then one wonders how functional a whole community of such people, thrown in together, would be! I imagine a scenario like that described in Milton Rokeach's *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti*.[70] But then that's not too different from the gospels' picture of the bickering disciples, is it?)

Davies aims his new hypothesis at a few other targets and pulls the trigger to see what will happen. For example, what was the point of Jesus' parables? Though Davies seemed properly agnostic about current chic scholarly consensus earlier in the book (the glib attempts to make Jesus into an eco-feminist, a community organizer, a lesbian, *etc.*), he seems here to buy too quickly into a consensus that he finds he can turn to his purpose. He quotes a number of recent scholars who, in my view, drastically over-interpret the parables, making them into (predictably) 'unique' literary experiences aimed by the Beat-Zen Jesus at his hearers to 'disarm' them. and 'open up new horizons' of existential rebirth. The parables "destroy their accustomed worlds" and transvaluate their comfortable values, *etc.*, *etc.* I am reminded of A.D. Loman's observation that if Paul had really

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written the Epistle to the Galatians to the rude congregation whose name appears on it, it would be like Hegel lecturing to Samoan savages. Such interpretations as Davies accepts from the SBL adepts seem more in place in liberal seminary chapel homilies or church basement Serendipity groups. Davies, to his credit, does at least strive to bring such trendy sloganeering down to earth and asks precisely *what kind* of eye-opening-rebirth-into-a-new-world experiences we are talking about. What would it

have *looked like* if all this rhetoric were justified? And he says there is one single candidate: Jesus must have been using his parables to induce hypnotic spirit-possession like his own in the hearer! Either Davies is confused here or I am: elsewhere he takes Pentecost and its Johannine counterpart [20:22] seriously enough to allow that spirit-possession like Jesus' own did not occur till after Jesus' departure. But his defining of the Kingdom of God as the replacement of demon-possession by God-possession seems to require that the latter was already happening at Jesus' hands. Interestingly, Davies here reflects the approach of his book's dedicatee Morton Smith, who, in *The Secret Gospel*, made Jesus into a Mesmerist, too.

At any rate, the result, at least post-Jesus, was a Christianity that began within the narrow parameters of a possession cult like those found today in Voodoo and Santeria. This means Davies pictures all the first communities as Corinthian franchises with all the accompanying pyrotechnics. It was only subsequently that, as we would expect, charisma got routinized and spirits gave way to sacraments, prophecies to presbyteries (a process described masterfully well in Davies's earlier book *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts*).[71]

Why does Jesus sound so different in the Fourth Gospel from the way(s) he sounds in the first three? Critical scholars have long since admitted that John's discourses have nothing to do with the words of a historical Jesus, while the Synoptics sometimes offer genuine words, though they by no means lack contributions from Christian Jesus-prophets who spoke in his name. Maximal conservatives like
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Archbishop Temple[72] and George E. Ladd[73] who followed him have always maintained that John's discourses were real Jesus-logia, but they represent his speaking style with his inner circle in private (despite the fact that John 18:20 explicitly rejects the notion of private teaching!). Davies of course does not mind admitting that Jesus-prophets fabricated many Jesus-words, but his new contribution is a masterstroke of harmonization: Davies says the Synoptic sayings are those of Jesus in his normal state of mind, while the Johannine sayings are the oracles of Jesus channeling the Son/Spirit of God. It would have been this latter entity that Jesus and his first hearers envisioned as descending from heaven to reveal

salvation to mortals, not Jesus of Nazareth himself. Christians, Davies is saying, made the same mistake the opponents of Jesus did in John 6:42 (“They said, “Isn’t this Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? Yet here he is saying, “I have descended from heaven”?’”). Thus the Johannine discourses are indeed the product of an early Jesus prophet —but his name was Jesus!

Here and elsewhere Davies seems to me to try to make use of discredited evidence that would nonetheless come in mighty handy. He quotes Matthew Black to the effect that maybe we can reclaim the Johannine material by positing that it does go back to Jesus albeit via a tunnel of “targumizing” and redaction. The originals must be seen in a glass darkly, or not at all, so tenuous is the imagined connection. Again, it sure would be great if Jesus had really said something like Luke has him say in chapter 4: “’Although there are good reasons to doubt the narrative historicity of Luke’s account of Jesus’ initial sermon in Nazareth, the report does give us an accurate view of Luke’s thoughts on the matter [Let’s hope so!]. In the context of Jesus’ healing career, Luke was quite possibly correct.” The relevant evidence is no good, but let’s count it anyway.

Similarly, Davies’s case admittedly depends on taking the core of the story of Jesus’ baptism as historical. He invokes the criterion of embarrassment (or as Crossan calls it, “damage control”): surely
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the early Church would never have fabricated a story that gave it so much trouble. But as apologist John Warwick Montgomery once pointed out,[74] everything Jesus (supposedly) said offended *some*-body in the early Church. And form criticism demands that every pericope had at some point been useful to *someone*.[75] Peter’s fans would never have fabricated the story of Peter’s denial, but Paul’s sure would have![76] Likewise we must suppose that at some early stage Christian story-tellers did not stumble at Jesus’ baptism by John and must have seen it as an anointing. It became problematical later, when polemics against John’s sect cast a new light on the episode. Again, the story may easily have been created as a cultic etiology to reinforce Christian baptism.[77] Davies calls on the criterion of dissimilarity, but (like Elaine Pagels in *The Origin of Satan*) [78] he needs to widen his scope to include Zoroastrianism, which

contains an almost identical tale: Zoroaster is coming up from the river where he has undergone a rite of priestly purification, when he sees the angel Vohu Mana descending from heaven to give him a draft of heavenly nectar and to call him to preach the unity of Ahura Mazda, whereupon the Evil One appears to tempt him from his course, albeit unsuccessfully. Was Jesus baptized by John? And if he was, did he experience the descent of the Spirit? Maybe. Who knows?

Again, Davies, like many scholars, regards as bedrock (in this case, a cornerstone as well) the Q saying that has Jesus casting out demons by the Spirit/finger of God [Matt. 12:28/Luke 11:20]. But shouldn't it be obvious that this saying is a piece of Christian theologizing that
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midrashically identifies Jesus with Moses? Jesus casts out demons by God's finger, unlike the sons of the Pharaoh-sees, who are like the Egyptian wizard-priests who cannot duplicate the feat. "This is the finger of God" [Ex. 8:19]. It already presupposes Jesus as a legendary wonder-worker and is hardly first-hand evidence.

Davies, then, sees the historical Jesus as a trance channeler who sporadically acted as the medium for the Son/Spirit of God, much as J.Z. Knight channeled the Atlantean war chief Ramtha. (But is there any hint in the gospels of this kind of intermittence of Jesus' divine' afflatus?) Essentially, one might say, Davies attributes to Jesus something like Basilides' Christology of Jesus becoming the human host of an angelic power as of his baptism, only whereas Basilides saw the possession as extending till the cross, Davies sees the possession as on-again, off-again. After Jesus, Davies reasons, his followers began to identify him with the Spirit that he channeled. This confusion would later result in Jesus' posthumous induction into the Trinity.

At this point one expects Davies to tie the discussion in with that of his *Revolt of the Widows,* where he suggests the eponymous apostles of the various Apocryphal Acts were originally charismatic itinerants like those mentioned in the *Didache*. They claimed to be successors of Jesus' disciples, and eventually they were merged with them in the popular imagination, so that the characters of the Apocryphal Acts of Paul, Peter, Andrew, et. al., really reflect the second-century itinerants, now nameless. This mixing of the itinerants with the apostles whose legacy they carried

on represents a further step on the path marked out when people crossed the line between Jesus and the Son of God whom he represented. Jesus became the Son of God; the disciples became Jesuses ("He who hears you hears me;" "Was Paul crucified for you?"); the charismatic second-century apostles became Paul, John, *etc.*, *etc.*

And in turn, this point suggests another: are the numerous healing and exorcism tales of the Jesus-tradition necessarily evidence for Jesus at all? As Davies makes clear in *The Revolt of the Widows*, these stories survived as paradigms, even as formulae, used by early Christian healers and exorcists. Jesus appears in them as
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the *exousia* (authority) invoked to work the miracle. Form-critically we ought to expect mentions of "the Most High God," *etc.*, to occur in the adjurations the exorcist speaks *to* the demon. They have been transferred to the furious mouths of the devils for Christological purposes, to retroject into Jesus' lifetime the acclamations once expected from demons under the earth at the Parousia [Phil. 2:6–11].[79] In any case, as we read the stories now, the name of Jesus, by virtue of his mention in the paradigmatic story, is the authoritative name at which the demons must shudder when Christian exorcists invoke it ("Jesus I know, and I am familiar with Paul, but who the hell are *you*?" Acts 19:15) by reciting the story aloud. Thus the stories are primary evidence not for Jesus himself but for the early Christian healers and exorcists. What does the conformity of the gospel healing categories to the psychosomatic diagnostic manual prove? Not that Jesus really healed people psychosomatically, but that early Christians, who called on the name of "Jesus, God of the Hebrews," did. If there had ever been extravagant stories of Jesus replacing lost limbs or reanimating rotting carcasses, they were swiftly weeded out because of their uselessness, the inability of anyone to replicate the results.(Of course, Jesus' nature miracles functioned as epiphany stories; no one in his right mind ever tried to imitate them.)

Davies's efforts to place Jesus neatly into an equivalent anthropological category seem to me to stretch the evidence, both exegetical and ethnological. Jesus is never shown going into and out of trance states (Luke 10:21, which might be read this way, however, is Lukan redaction), though there is seemingly no embarrassment at showing

equivalent oddities (*e.g.*, his healing by spit and polish), so we need not plead that the crucial evidence, which *must* have existed, was suppressed. Third-World mediums are fortune tellers; Jesus made prophetic predictions—are these the same? Mediums offer protective charms, while Jesus exorcised—same thing?

Let me apply to Davies's fascinating book his own verdict on someone else's theory: "one can imagine such things happening, but 'might' is about as far as one can go."

[1] Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," pp. 37–41; Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*. Trans. Frank Clarke [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969: 27–28].

[2] It works as well with treasure as with garbage, you know.
[3] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 2/2, Fall 1995.
[4] Irving Wallace, *The Word* [NY: Random House, 1972].
[5] Peter van Greenaway, *The Judas Gospel* [NY: Dell, 1973].
[6]Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Essene Odyssey* [Rockport: Element Books, 1991].
[7] Edmund Wilson, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* [NY: Meridian Books, 1964].
[8] Andre Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Preliminary Survey* [NY: Macmillan, 1956].
[9] John M. Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* [Baltimore: Penguin/Pelican Books, 1959].
[10] Hugh J. Schonfield, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* [New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957].
[11] R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* [NY: Oxford University Press / A Galaxy Book, 1956: 242–245, 248, 281].
[12] Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*. Trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971].
[13] Hugh J. Schonfield, *Jesus: Man — Mystic — Messiah* [London: Open Gate Press, 2004].
[14] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 12/2, Fall 2006.
[15] Robert Eisenman, *The New Testament Code: The Cup of the Lord, the Damascus Covenant, and the Blood of Christ* [London: Watkins. 2006].
[16] R.H. Charles, *Revelation*. International Critical Commentary [NY: Continuum, 1920]. "Preterism" denotes the interpretation of the Book of Revelation as predicting events expected in the near future relative to the author and his original readers, not events in the distant future.
[17] Jacob L. Teicher, "The Dead Sea Scrolls – Documents of the Jewish-Christian Sect of Ebionites" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 2, No. 2: 67–99]; "The Damascus Fragments and the Origins of the Jewish Christian Sect" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 2, No.3: 115–143]; "Jesus in the Habakkuk Scroll" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 3, No. 2: 53–55]; "The Teaching of the Pre–Pauline Church in the Dead Sea Scrolls" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 3, No. 3: 111–118]; "The Teaching of the Pre-Pauline Church in the Dead Sea Scrolls—II" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 3, No. 4: 139–150]; "The Teaching of the Pre-Pauline Church in the Dead Sea Scrolls—III" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 4, No. 1: 1–13]; "The Teaching of the Pre-Pauline Church in the Dead Sea Scrolls—IV" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 4, No. 2: 49–58]; "The Teaching of the Pre-Pauline Church in the Dead Sea Scrolls—V" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 4, No. 3: 93–103]; "The Teaching of the Pre-Pauline Church in the Dead Sea Scrolls—VI" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 4, No. 4: 139–153]; "Jesus' Sayings in the Dead Sea Scrolls" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 5, No. 1: 38–40]. "The Habakkuk Scroll" *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Vol. 5, No. 1: 47–59].
[18] Martin Noth, "Figures alongside Moses," in Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*. Trans. Bernhard W. Anderson [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972: 175–188].
[19] Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church*. Trans. Douglas R.A. Hare [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969: 43–46].
[20] Weeden, *The Two Jesuses*.
[21] Scott Morschauser, "Dives and Divorce: On the Composition and Concerns of Luke 16:14–31" *Journal of Higher Criticism* [12/1, Spring 2006: 68–90].
[22] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 12/2, Fall 2006.
[23] James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty* [NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006].
[24] Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* [NY: Dell, 1982, 1983].

[25] P. Vogt, *Der Stammbaum bei den heiligen Evangelisten Matthäus* [*Biblische Studien* 13^{3} ,Freiburg: Herder, 1907]; J.M. Heer, *Die Stammbäume Jesu nach Matthäus und Lukas* [Biblische Studien 15^{1-2}, Freibug: Herder, 1910].
[26] Frank R. Zindler, "Where Jesus Never Walked." In Zindler, *Through Atheist Eyes: Scenes from a World that Won't Reason Vol. 1. Religions & Scriptures* [Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011: 27–55]; Rene Salm, *The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus*. Scholars Edition [Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2008].
[27]*Cf.* Kathleen Corley, *Women & the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* [Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2002: 32]: "Nearly 50% of the women in second temple Palestine were named either Mary (Mariamne) or Salome. This means

that every second woman in Palestine at the time bore one of these two names."
[28] Eisenman says this, too, in *James the Brother of Jesus* [pp. 8, 142–143, 772, 778–779, 844–845].
[29] Adolf von Harnack, "Die Verklärungsgeschichte Jesu, der Bericht des Paulus I Kor 15, 3 ff. und die beiden Christusvision des Petrus" [*Sitzungsberichte der Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Phil.-hist. Klasse, 1922: 62–80].
[30] Ethelbert Stauffer, "The Caliphate of James." Trans. Darrell J. Doughty. *Journal of Higher Criticism* [4/2, Fall 1997: 120–143].
[31] Strauss, p. 233.
[32] Abba Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel from the First through the Seventeenth Centuries* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1959: 4–6].
[33] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 12/1, Spring 2006.
[34] Hyam Maccoby, *Jesus the Pharisee* [London: SCM Press, 2003].
[35] Jacob Neusner, William S. Green, and Ernest Frerichs (eds.), *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* [NY: Cambridge University Press, 1987].
[36] William Scott Green, "Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition" *Aufstieg und Niedergang der romischen Welt* [19/2, 1979: 628–639].
[37] Tamis Hoover Renteria, "The Elijah/Elisha Stories: A Socio-cultural Analysis of Prophets and People in Ninth-Century B.C.E. Israel." In Robert B. Coote (ed.) *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective*. Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992: 75–126]; Judith A. Todd, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle." In Robert B. Coote (ed.) *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective*. Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992: 1–36].
[38] Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992: 210].
[39] Euripides, *The Bacchae*. Trans. William Arrowsmith. In David Greene and Richard Lattimore, (eds.), *Greek Tragedies Volume 3* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960: 226]. Earlier in the play we find a scene closely paralleling Acts 5:34–39, the seer Teiresias warning King Pentheus not to persecute the new religion. Indeed the play is peppered with lines that pop up again, almost verbatim, in Acts.
[40] William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, pp. 216–230.
[41] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 26–32.
[42] John A.T. Robinson, "The Most Primitive Christology of All?" In Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies*. Studies in Biblical Theology 34 [London: SCM Press, 1962: 139–153].
[43] Theissen, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, pp. 171.
[44] Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Trans. John Marsh [NY: Harper & Row, rev. ed. 1968: 155].
[45] Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, pp. 39–41.
[46] Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, p. 46.
[47] Oscar Cullmann, "Dissensions within the Early Church." In Richard Batey (ed.), *New Testament Issues*. Harper Forum Books [NY: Harper & Row, 1970: 119–129]. See also Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity*, pp. 5–6.
[48] Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, Chapter 3, "Jesus and Charismatic Judaism," pp. 58–82.
[49] Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*. Trans. A.S. Geden [1906, rpt. NY: Dover Publications, 1966: 19–23].
[50] Thankfully, it *is* readily apparent to E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985: 182–184].
[51] Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 16.
[52] Jacob Neusner, *The Peripatetic Saying: The Problem of the Thrice-Told Tale in Talmudic Literature*. Brown Judaic Studies 89 [Chico: Scholars Press, 1985]; Neusner, "Rabbinic Biography: Exemplary Pattern in Place of Lives of Sages" *Journal of Higher Criticism* [11/2, Fall 2005: 19–13].
[53] Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* [NY: Scribners, 2nd rev. ed., 1963: 178–179].
[54] Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* [Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985].
[55] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 2/1, Spring 1995.
[56] Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Unlocking the Secrets of His Life Story* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992].
[57] *Pope* means 'father,' and *Abraham* means 'great father' or 'father of a multitude.'
[58] Norman Golb, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls? The Search for the Secret of Qumran* [NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995].
[59] A technique of ancient interpretation whereby one might, with the eye of faith, discern in scripture hitherto-hidden messages for one's own day, not dissimilar in principle to the recent Bible Code gimmick. See Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975: 38–45].
[60] Strauss, pp. 46–50, explains the Rationalist approach to the gospels, then, throughout the book, carries on a two-front battle against both supernaturalist and Rationalist apologists, like Zorro dueling two swordsmen at once.
[61] Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* [NY: Verso Books, rev. ed., 1988: 14].
[62] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 12/2, Fall 2006.
[63] Lena Einhorn, *The Jesus Mystery: Astonishing Clues to the True Identities of Jesus and Paul* [Guilford, CT: Lyons Press/Globe Pequot Press, 2007].
[64] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 12/2, Fall 2006.
[65] Luigi Cascioli, *The Fable of Christ: Book of Accusation*. (www.luigicascioli.com. 2006).
[66] Oscar Cullmann, *The Johannine Circle*. Trans. John Bowden [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976: 77].
[67] Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke–Acts: A Defining Struggle* [Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006: 76–78].
[68] Jacques Derrida, apparently not a big gospel reader, was surprised to learn the Veronica episode was not featured in any gospel text. Derrida, "Living On: *Border Lines*." Trans. James Hulbert. In Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida,

Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller, *Deconstruction and Criticism* [NY: Continuum, 1979: 130].
[69] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 7/1, Spring 2000.
[70] Milton Rokeach, *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti: A Narrative Study of Three Lost Men* [NY: Vintage Books, 1967].
[71] Stevan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980].
[72] William Temple, *Readings in St John's Gospel*. St Martin's Library [London: Macmillan, 1968: xvii].
[73] George Eldon Ladd, *New Testament and Criticism*.
[74] John Warwick Montgomery in *The Altizer-Montgomery Dialogue: A Chapter in the God Is Dead Controversy* [Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967: 64].
[75] Karl Kundsin, "Primitive Christianity in the Light of Gospel Research." In Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Kundsin, *Form Criticism: Two Essays on New Testament Research*. Trans. Frederick C. Grant [NY: Harper & Row Torchbooks, 1962: 86–95]; Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, pp. 4–5.
[76] Alfred Loisy, *Birth of the Christian Religion*, p. 102.
[77] Charles Guignebert, *Jesus*. Trans. S.H. Hooke [New Hyde Park: University Books, 1956: 147–148].
[78] Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan: How Christians Demonized Jews, Pagans, and Heretics* [NY: Vintage Books, 1996].
[79] Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, p. 56.

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Chapter Five:

Gospel Studies

Our source materials for the life of Jesus are the four canonical gospels and nothing else. Many of us think the prospects for success as we dig there are not too bright. Thus, it is not as if we exclude the various apocryphal gospels because the canonical four are so much better. It is rather that books like the Gospels of Thomas, of Peter, of Mary, *etc.*, are even *worse* as historical sources. And, though it may seem like putting the horse after the cart, I have followed my survey of recent works on Jesus with discussions of several books treating individual gospels. After all, one's use of these writings in one's theories about Jesus depends on one's assessment of their worth as historical sources. I have chosen one volume each on Matthew, Luke, John, and Thomas (though this last deals equally with John). With Mark, the focus widens. I discuss two innovative books on canonical Mark and three scholarly works on the Secret Gospel of Mark, discovered (or fabricated) by Morton Smith.

Yuri Kuchinsky has made an elaborate case that the Middle English Pepysian Gospel Harmony is based on an ancient harmony compiled by Justin Martyr, in turn based on earlier versions of the gospel texts than survive anywhere else. His extensive analysis calls for an extensive analysis of its own.

And then there is the question of what we do and don't know about Jesus from sources outside the gospels. In this connection I review Robert E. van Voorst's book on that topic and Frank R. Zindler's on alleged ancient Jewish mentions of Jesus.

Finally, I discuss a brand new and admittedly fictive gospel, Norman Mailer's book *The Gospel According to the Son*. Did he do anything fundamentally different from what the ancient gospel writers did?

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Do the Matth[1]

Arlo J. Nau's creative study *Peter in Matthew: Discipleship, Diplomacy, and Dispraise[2]* ought to have received more notice than it has. In a time when one exegetical fad seems to follow another in rapid succession, each furnishing a wedge for a raft of new dissertation topics, Nau's investigation of the Peter character in the First Gospel shows the abiding value of both older and newer methodologies by using each (redactional, rhetorical, and reader- response) at the proper stage. In many ways the project is reminiscent of Theodore J. Weeden's fascinating *Mark—Traditions in Conflict*.[3] The similarity to Nau's work is simply that, as Weeden tried to account for the rough treatment of the Twelve in Mark, concluding that Mark was no fan of theirs, but rather tried to put them in the shade in order to make unnamed rival apostles shine the more brightly, Nau is trying to lay bare a slightly milder, but no less important, Matthean 'dispraise' of Peter in favor of apostolic collegiality on the one hand and of Jesus as the only true foundation [*cf*. 1 Cor. 3:11] on the other. As such, Matthew's treatment of Peter, as Nau sees it, falls somewhere between the Fourth Evangelist's gentle downplaying of Peter in favor of the Beloved Disciple[4] and Mark's polemic against the Twelve.

One of the glaring faults of the self-proclaimed Narrative Critics, mired in the tar pit of the old New Criticism and seemingly oblivious of contemporary Narratology,[5] was their refusal to consider anything but the final text of each gospel as if it had been written *de novo* by its evangelist. This certainly made things easier! Is Matthew largely

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an expansion of Mark? Who cares! So they said. But as Tzvetan Todorov[6] explained, the critic ought not narrow his vision in such a case. One may treat original *de novo* texts (if there are any!) as monovalent, but there are many works which are parasitic upon previous works (parodies, plagiarisms, pastiches), and if one fails to read the secondary text in light of the primary text, one will miss the point. The 'in-jokes,' so to speak, will go right over one's head. Matthew and Luke would obviously fall into this category. Todorov says such texts speak polyvalently. Matthew and Luke are in dialogue with Mark, and it will not do to try to make sense of Matthew as if it were a simple monologue, any more than it would to read

1 Corinthians oblivious of the fact that it is only half of an epistolary correspondence.

Nau is fully alert to the polyvalence of Matthew as a tendential rewriting of Mark. It is a redaction-critical commonplace to see Matthew's gospel as reflecting greater prominence for Peter than Mark's does. And yet, Nau notes, Matthew often takes from Peter with the left hand what it seems (compared with Mark) he has given with the right. Why should this be? Here Nau is careful not to fall into the trap of over-simplification, as if we had all the pieces of the puzzle before us. Wrede[7] had long ago warned us to be mindful of the very fragmentary character of the literary remains of early Christianity which we call the New Testament, lending a false impression of completeness. Nau realizes there must be missing pieces, though we may be able to discern their jigsaw shape from the contours of the once-adjacent pieces we do have. Thus he posits an intermediate stage between Mark and Matthew. Matthew does contain a post- (or non-) Markan veneration and elevation of Peter, but this is not Matthew's own view of Peter, as if everything non-

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Markan in Matthew were Matthew's own innovation. No, Matthew is reacting to and satirizing this (previous) exaltation of Peter. In a sense, he is harking back to Mark! In this kind of argumentation Nau is right in line with much other recent Matthean scholarship which is able to distinguish between the non- and post-Markan tradition Matthew inherited from his community (*e.g.*, *re* the Gentile Mission or the Sermon on the Mount logia) and his own redaction of it.

The traditional confusion as to Matthew's estimate of Peter (exalting him relative to Mark) is the result of correctly discerning the clear pro-Petrine character of much of the non-Markan material in Matthew, then assuming it represents Matthew's own redaction, and finally harmonizing away the Matthean anti-Peter material through frequent invocation of the 'irony' dodge ("He must not really mean it. That Matthew: what a kidder!"). The same sort of redaction critical short-circuiting has resulted in the premature pegging of Luke as pro-women by some feminist New Testament scholars. As I try to show in *The Widow Traditions in Luke-Acts: A Feminist-Critical Scrutiny*,[8] the pro-women material is there all right, but it is all pre-Lukan, and Luke's redaction

attempts to domesticate and defuse it. What is prominent in a writer's work does not necessarily represent his own contribution. It may be only the straw man he aims to knock down.

If Nau has an ear open for the polyvalent senses of Matthew's text *vis-à-vis* Mark's, he is careful to distinguish between the two levels appropriate to redaction criticism on the one hand and reader-response/rhetorical criticism on the other. That is, like Marxsen,[9] Bornkamm,[10] and Conzelmann,[11] he is attuned to the small but revealing changes one evangelist makes in another's work (such as

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Luke's omitting "with power" from Mark's prediction of the coming of the kingdom). Such changes as these we cannot expect ordinary readers (whether ancient or modern) to have noticed, especially if, as seems likely, they were not reading two gospels alongside one another like the critic (the would-be 'ideal reader' or 'super-reader') does. And yet the accumulation of such micro-changes does seem to characterize an author and his intention. That is what the redaction critics were trying to discover: the presuppositions (the 'theology') of the evangelists, not necessarily what they tried to communicate to the common reader.[12]

But reader-response criticism tries to discern the impact the text would make on readers,[13] whether intended by the author or not. Nau is careful to work on both levels. Subtle redactional changes form a portrait of the implied author's own views of Peter and Petrine authority and thus give us a Matthew who might expect his readers to notice, not these small alterations, but broader ones consistent with them, those one need not be comparing Matthew with Mark in order to pick up. As for these latter, Nau lines up an impressive list of Matthean set-ups, places where Peter, as the reader would expect (like a Roman Catholic reader today), is held in honor, all of them matched by an equal number of put-downs or anticlimaxes. In Matthew 14:28–33, Matthew has added Peter walking on the water—only to sink like a 'rock' once, like Wile E. Coyote, he realizes nothing is holding him up! And Matthew's redaction of the Markan version makes *all* the disciples confess, "Truly, you are the son of God!" stealing the thunder from Peter's also-ran confession in Matthew 16:16. In fact, in the walking on water episode, Peter is embarrassed before the others, dismissed as a "man of little faith."

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Matthew has thus anticipated the disgrace of Peter's later denials. There, too, as in Mark, his Last Supper boast of loyalty to the death only adds to the disgrace when, not having fled the Garden like the rest, he nonetheless explicitly denies and damns Jesus in the high priest's courtyard. It is as if Matthew has rewritten the wave-walking story as a doublette of the denial episode.

As for the Caesarea Philippi confession scene [Matt. 16:13–23], redaction critics had always wondered why, if Matthew wanted to tone down Jesus' rebuke to Peter, he did not (like Luke) simply chop it. Why let the Markan rebuke (8:33, "Out of my sight, Satan!") stand (and even elaborate it, specifying the fatal words of Peter) and insert the "Blessed art thou" saying in front of it? Scholars have often suggested this benediction originally belonged to an Easter context. Plausible enough, but why would Matthew have retrojected it here? And why not simply *replace* the rebuke with it? Simply because, Nau says, Matthew wants to remind the reader that the keys of binding and loosing were granted to a singularly fallible man. Like a counter-campaign message: "Clinton says he's patriotic now? Remember when he burned the flag in his student days?" And then in 18:18 we have a division of the power of the keys among the rest of the disciples, as if Jesus had suddenly seized the coat of many colors he had given Peter and ripped it up, giving one of the colored stripes to each of the other disciples. "I'll bet you say that to all the apostles!" Ouch!

Following the Rich Young Ruler pericope [Matt.19:16–22], Peter boasts (as if in contrast to the weak-willed, would-be disciple now walking away) that he and his brethren *have* done what he required of the young man: they have left all property and possessions. "What about us?" This calls forth the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (unique to Matthew 20:1–16), which ends with the same conclusion as the Rich Young Ruler episode [Matt. 19:30], "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." In short, by adding the parable as a commentary on the original reply of Jesus to Peter's boast ("What a good boy am I!"), Matthew has made the self-satisfied Peter into a duplicate of the Rich Ruler: he meets the basic requirement, and yet he lacks something crucial.

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Nau's key insight is that in all these instances Matthew is not correcting Mark, making Peter look better than Mark made him look, but rather correcting a post-Markan exaltation of Peter, taking Peter *back* down a peg. By his use of careful redaction criticism Nau shows Matthew's motivation. By his use of reader-response criticism, he shows what measures Matthew actually took. Why has Nau's impressive study not been more widely welcomed? Perhaps because it tends to complicate the game, and the game is already complicated enough.

Mark: Still Secret[14]

Heikki Räisänen (*The "Messianic Secret" in Mark's Gospel*) understands that, in the field of New Testament scholarship, one must often progress by looking backward, since the incisive ideas of an earlier, bolder, era have in many cases been repressed. In particular, and to his credit, Räisänen looks back to William Wrede. Just as his excellent *Beyond New Testament Theology* owed a debt of inspiration to Wrede's great 1897 essay "The Tasks and Methods of 'New Testament Theology,'" so does *The "Messianic Secret" in Mark's Gospel* engage, defend, and critically rehabilitate Wrede's masterpiece *The Messianic Secret*. Rather than picking a couple of holes in the fabric of the earlier classic, in the manner of many who would like to retroactively erase works of scholarship whose implications they loathe, Räisänen goes back to the older text armed with more recent critical tools and insights which in some cases undermine his predecessor's arguments, in others shore them up in ways unavailable to the original writer. When one is done reading *The "Messianic Secret" in Mark's Gospel* one comes away feeling that this is probably what Wrede would have said had he lived till today and written a second edition.

As in *Beyond New Testament Theology* and *Paul and the Law*, both of which proceed from Räisänen's stubborn refusal to smuggle systematic theology into the descriptive task of exegesis, *The "Messianic Secret" in Mark's Gospel* rejects the temptation to

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harmonize. Only dogmatic harmonization can yield the sausage of 'Biblical' *or* 'New Testament Theology,' and only harmonization can

pretend to synthesize some logocentric mix called ‘Pauline Theology’ from the disparate texts huddling uncomfortably under the name of ‘Paul.’ Likewise, Räisänen resolves not to allow some unitary theological theme to gobble up and spit out the numerous autonomies and antinomies, anomalies and aporias of Mark’s text. Against the facile Narrative ‘critics,’ Räisänen easily shows that Mark’s narrative world is as incoherent as the conceptual world of the Pauline canon. And he shows how this state of affairs is often the result of Mark using the same characters for different purposes at different times. For instance. the disciples are *both* faithful links back to the historical Jesus *and* homiletical stand-ins for thick-headed readers. This is why they can look pretty good in some passages, pretty bad in others. A coherent story was not Mark’s top agenda item (nor has it ever been for readers of Mark, till very recently).

The same holds true for the secrecy motif(s) sprinkled throughout the gospel. Räisänen dispels a prevalent misreading of Wrede’s theory. He shows that Wrede argued that Mark inherited the secret rather than having created it. Mark’s own redaction of the material began to obscure the originally consistent secrecy theme. This explains why the final version of Mark allows the cat to escape the bag rather frequently. One must chalk up Mark’s inconsistency to the same cause as Matthew’s and Luke’s: they no longer understood the point of the secrecy and thus felt no urgency either to eliminate it or to carry it through. Matthew and Luke are even less consistent than Mark, but Mark’s inconsistency is harder to explain if the secrecy business is his own invention.

Räisänen shows that Mark uses secrecy for a number of purposes. The unheeded commands of Jesus to silence about his miracles function analogously to the bar raised up in miracle stories when either Jesus or the bystanders question the likelihood of the feat or the worthiness of the recipient: the drama is thus heightened. Just as Jesus manages to raise up Jairus’ daughter despite the jeering of the mourners, just as the Syro-Phoenician woman sticks to her

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guns and receives her blessing after all, so does Jesus’ command to silence form a dam over which the gospel tidings of his mighty power cannot help flooding. Can God create a river too mighty for him to dam up?

Apparently so. The use of the secrecy motif in such cases is to highlight the miracles as 'epiphanies.' Räisänen seems to have a bit more trouble with the silencing of the demons, but here, too, the point is narrative strategy: like the Transfiguration, the demonic acclamations must be cut short so as to function as mere glimpses of the true but hidden divine nature of the Son of God.

Räisänen spends a large portion of the book, deservedly, on the wretched knot of Mark chapter 4 and the colliding statements made there as to why Jesus taught in parables. It is impossible, he shows, either to ameliorate the harsh sour-grapes predestinarianism of verses 11–12, or to bring the rest of Mark's treatment of parables in line with it. (Here we feel we are back reading *Paul and the Law*.) On the whole, Räisänen is able to account for much of the parable-secrecy motif in terms of what I would call Gnosticizing apologetics: the parables are provided with a kind of escape clause allowing Christian teachers of Mark's day to smuggle into them their own Christian teaching without having to claim, bald-facedly, that Jesus expressly taught it, as in John's Gospel or the Pistis Sophia. Sure he taught it, but you had to have ears to hear! Räisänen is not unaware that this secret content is not really provided by Mark, any more than the specific content of his ballyhooed 'preaching of the kingdom.'

The central feature of Wrede's Messianic Secret theory was the origin of the pre-Markan scheme to juggle two early Christologies, one which saw Jesus as becoming Messiah at his resurrection, the other retroactively making him Messiah from his baptism on. The harmonization quotient was the secrecy. One faction is correct: Jesus was actually Messiah all along. But the other faction's view is natural, too: Jesus kept his Messianic identity a secret till the resurrection, which is why some naturally thought it began only then.

More recently, Walter Schmithals has proposed a friendly amendment: perhaps Mark created the secrecy business to account for and to explain away the modest faith of the Q Community

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who apparently knew of no passion, resurrection, or messiahship connected to Jesus, not even any miracles—if you take the Temptation narrative as a repudiation of such. Schmithals's Mark wanted to affirm the Q faith as far as it went but also to draw that faction into the fellowship of

his own Messianic faith. Räisänen dissents from some elements of Schmithals's reconstruction largely on the basis, it seems to me, of insupportable assumptions about the Q community. Räisänen simply finds it impossible to believe that the Q people could have remained ignorant of what other early Christians thought. But what evidence can there be that they weren't, when these elements are absent from Q? Isn't Räisänen... well, *harmonizing?* (In the same way, he just cannot bring himself to believe that Mark intended that the disciples drew an utter blank at the idea of "rising from the dead" (9:10)—but why not admit here, as he does elsewhere, that Mark was sometimes guilty of what John C. Meagher[15] called "clumsy construction"? It's just a lame way of preventing the disciples as characters in the narrative from heeding the Passion prediction aimed not at them but at the reader.[16]

Anyway, after trying to widen the gap separating himself from Schmithals, Räisänen then settles on a closely parallel reconstruction: Mark was trying to augment the too-spare faith of the Q community (and perhaps of the itinerant radicals) in the same way the later strata of Q2 and Q3 did, adding actual Christology (*i.e.*, Jesus-worship) and futuristic eschatology, and some manner of cross-soteriology.

Räisänen is pretty tough on another favorite exegete of mine, Theodore J. Weeden. Weeden's thesis probably doesn't carry through all the way: as Räisänen correctly sees, the brief flirtation with death for a few hours on the cross denotes no 'cross theology' that one might oppose to a 'divine man' Christology, but rather constitutes a prime example of such triumphalism. And yet in some

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ways Weeden's theory looks more attractive than ever in the light of the work of Stevan L. Davies (*The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts*), where a strong link is forged between the legendary personae of the holy apostles on the one hand and the second-century charismatic itinerants on the other. But in any case I think it premature to dismiss Weeden's suggestion that Mark's consistently negative portrayal of the disciples denotes a Marcion-like polemic against the churches that claimed them as their figurehead. Räisänen himself has demonstrated that the lack of absolute consistency in an apparent Markan theme does not count against it. So what if Mark once or twice pulls his punches so as to

use his favorite punching bags temporarily as sandbags for some other task? And Arlo J. Nau *(Peter in Matthew)* has shown how a gospel writer could, much as Weeden envisions, artfully juxtapose praise with deflation in order to make apostolic characters look bad.

For my money, Räisänen skips too quickly by the astonishing ending of the gospel. He almost descends to the level of the harmonist Narrative critics in gratuitously assuming that Mark took for granted that the disciples soon leaned of the resurrection despite the stubborn silence of the women. If that is indeed what Mark had in mind he certainly had a strange way of showing it. Why not connect their apparent failure to get the news of Jesus' impending appearance in Galilee with Peter's failure to hear Jesus' prediction [Mark 14:28] of the same reunion back at the Last Supper? Wouldn't the latter lead us to expect that Peter and the others would not otherwise know to expect such a reunion? Then if the message entrusted to Mary Magdalene and her sisters failed to get through, how in Mark's narrative world are we supposed to imagine Peter knowing to head for Galilee? Yes, Räisänen has taught us not to expect complete consistency from Mark, but this isn't a case of Mark contradicting what he himself said elsewhere. What does he says anywhere else that would lead us to believe Peter must have had a reunion with the Risen Jesus? We can't just assume Mark thought so because it says so in other gospels. (Narrative critics offer the trump card that, if the women did not in fact relay their news, Mark himself could not have known of it. But he 'knew' of it in the same way he

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'knew' what Jesus said in Gethsemane: he is the omniscient narrator, and he made it up.)

One last aspect of the secrecy motif Räisänen neglects (though his discussion of the parables anticipates it) is the question of sheer imposture and pious fraud. Isn't it obvious that the warning to tell no one of the Transfiguration vision till after the resurrection is a sham designed to evade the force of the scribes' objection that Jesus couldn't have been the Messiah since Elijah had not made a public appearance to announce him? "Uh, *sure* he did! But only a handful of people got to see it, and they were told to keep it under their burnooses! That's why you're only now hearing it!" And can we exclude from our consideration of the empty tomb story

the suspicion, hardly a new one, that the silence of the women was another ploy to explain why no one (such as the redactor(s) of 1 Cor. 15:4–7) had heard of the tale till long afterward? It is just like Daniel 12:4, where the angel's command to seal up the revelation is merely a device to cover the too-recent origin of a supposedly old writing.

Markan Odyssey[17]

We seem to be getting closer and closer to Bruno Bauer, who contended that Mark the evangelist created the Jesus character for his gospel, a work of didactic fiction. Recent studies by Randel Helms (*Gospel Fictions*), John Dominic Crossan (*Who Killed Jesus?*), Robert M. Fowler (*Let the Reader Understand*) and others have demonstrated that Mark is even more of a creative author than redaction and composition critics had been willing to make him. Though some scholars agree with Walter Schmithals[18] that there simply was no oral-tradition period between Jesus and Mark, many have held out the hope that we might be able to discern a few tradition fragments here and there under the thick film of Markan composition. We are familiar with this sort of desperate pearl-diving from the attempts to isolate a few atoms of pre-Lukan "apostolic"

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tradition in the speeches of Acts, even though Earl Richard[19] and others have shown they are warp and woof the work of Luke himself. Now Dennis MacDonald,[20] insightful author of books including *The Legend and the Apostle*,[21] has shown about as convincingly as one might require that Mark has created very much of his Jesus story from Homer, mostly from *The Odyssey* and partly from *The Iliad.* His Jesus is a compound of Odysseus and Hector. Joseph of Arimathea is King Priam, the Gadarene Demoniac is Polyphemus, the Legion trapped in pigs' bodies are Odysseus' soldiers turned into swine by Circe, the Brothers Boanerges are Castor and Pollux, Bartimaeus is Tiresias, John the Baptist is Agamemnon, Herodias is Clytemnestra, the linen-clad young man in the Garden and at the tomb is Elpenor, *etc.* MacDonald had already demonstrated the systematic rewriting of *The Odyssey* in the Acts of Andrew.[22]

I will not try to summarize the argument, as if to save you the 'trouble' of reading this thoroughly fascinating book. No, let's just assume

MacDonald is correct and ask ourselves what else is left that might qualify as pre-Markan tradition. And how much of this in turn necessarily stems from the tradition of a historical Jesus. In asking these questions we will be attempting to figure out whether Mark was the first to historicize an originally mythic Jesus figure, or whether this step had already been taken prior to Mark. If the latter is the case, what sort of historical/historicized Jesus would Mark have had access to before his own attempt to model a Jesus on Odysseus and Hector?

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Mark may have derived his material on John the Baptist's preaching [1:4–8] and the Beelzebul controversy [3:22–30] from some edition of Q.[23] And these bits of Q seem to be part of a secondary Christianizing stratum. The same goes for Mark's Temptation narrative, which reads like an abridgment of the longer Q version represented in Luke and Matthew.[24] Likewise for the cross-bearing summons [8:34–38].

Mark has certainly woven the Corban controversy [7:1–23] from the Septuagint; likewise the complex in 3:13–21, 31–35, which is based on Exodus 18, where an embassy of Moses' kin successfully advises him to share the burden of his work with chosen assistants, the seventy elders. Mark, or possibly a tradition prior to him, has paralleled Jesus' choice of the Twelve and the visit of his family with this tale and reversed the order of the components, so as to contrast Jesus' family with Moses', and to withhold from them the idea of choosing the Twelve. The story [Mark 9:38–41] of the 'strange' exorcist (is there any other kind?) comes right from Numbers' version of the choosing of the seventy elders [Numbers 11:26–29]. Mark supplemented, as MacDonald recognizes, Homer with Jonah in the stilling of the storm and with Elisha in the multiplication of loaves. And of course a great amount of the Passion narrative comes from Psalm 22, Zechariah, and elsewhere, interspersed with Homeric material.

MacDonald implies that the various Markan healings and exorcisms are Markan creations, told for the sake of the secrecy motif, paralleling Odysseus's policy of concealing his identity for safety's sake. Since there is remarkably little to most of these stories beside the bare miracle incident as a prelude to a charge to keep the secret, we must let the

pre-Markan character of the stories go along with the secrecy motif. This includes even the Syro-Phoenician

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woman story, since it is prefaced by Jesus' thwarted wish to remain incognito. The healing of the man with the withered hand [3:1–6] might seem to be independent, but it is told simply as a lead-in to the plotting of the enemies of Jesus and thus may be dismissed as narrative-motivational filler by Mark (especially given the incoherence of the 'argument'). The healing of Peter's mother-in-law just so she can fix them dinner [1:29–31] is a comical piece of apocrypha we may credit to Mark's sense of humor.

One might wonder if the sequence of the daughter of Jairus, interrupted by the healing of the old woman, is a Markan creation based on the sacrifice of Iphigenia by Agamemnon to satisfy Athena's demand when the Greek fleet was stalled in the harbor. Jairus corresponds to Agamemnon, only in Mark's version he seeks to save his daughter's endangered life. The woman with the issue of blood is Athena in disguise, as she appears in *The Odyssey* to Telemachus. Does she intervene in order to delay Jesus' mission at Jairus' house? For her delay does result in the death of the girl, but Jesus raises her anyway.

Similarly, one might suspect that the Sabbath controversy episode in which Jesus defends his men for eating consecrated food [Mark 2:23–28] stems from the episode of Odysseus' men availing themselves of the sacred cattle of Helios. Mark would be challenging the very logic by which Odysseus' men were condemned.

And could the paralytic lowered through the roof by his stretcher-bearing friends have anything to do with Elpenor, who *fell* down from Circe's roof, his body being borne away thence some days later by friends? As Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins, so did Odysseus remove the dead Elpenor's reproach by finding the body and providing it due funeral honors.

And speaking of reproach, is it possible that the barb that Jesus eats with tax-collectors and sinners [Mark 2:16] reflects the impropriety one feels at Penelope tolerating, hosting, and feeding the wicked suitors? And the adjacent business about the absence of the bridegroom—Odysseus himself?

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As for the teaching Mark attributes to Jesus, we could count up the ambiguous parables of chapter 4, minus their interpretations, the Cynic-derivative Mission Charge in 6:7–13, the catchword material in 9:40–50 (Could the one who enters into the kingdom of God with one eye be Polyphemus? Guess not.), the teaching in chapter 10. None of it is very exceptional, and none needs to go back to a Christian messiah, real or fictive. Chapter 13, besides its Homeric material, is plainly apocalyptic pseudepigrapha.

So in sum, there is little reason to posit a pre-Markan tradition of Jesus as a healer or exorcist, even as a teacher. Most likely, Mark was the first to try to fill out and to historicize the mythic Jesus, an Osiris analogue.

(Secret) Mark[25]

Stephen Carlson (author of *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of* Secret Mark)[26] first happened upon a reference to the Secret Gospel of Mark when he was a teenager. It was in the mid-eighties, and he was perusing one of the Lincoln-Baigent-Leigh *Holy Blood-Holy Mackerel* books, and Morton Smith's 'discovery' was one of the buckets of sand upon which the authors erected their unstable house. Little did he know he would grow up to reveal that Smith was in the same camp as the *Holy Blood* trio: a purveyor of spurious ancient lore concerning Christian origins. I was a college sophomore in 1973 when Smith's books *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*[27] and *The Secret Gospel*[28] appeared. I saw and read only the latter at the time, but I immediately smelled a rat. I thought at once of the ancient Pauline pastiche, the Epistle to the Laodiceans. Secret Mark read as precisely the same sort of cento of phrases lifted from

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canonical scripture, mainly, of course, from Mark. In the intervening years, I became more than half persuaded that *the Secret Gospel* was real, at least a genuinely ancient apocryphon. Recent years shook my tentative confidence, however, and now I may say that the able Mr. Carlson has

marked the case closed. It no longer belongs in the *X-Files* of New Testament scholarship.

Carlson is not by trade a biblical scholar, though one would not guess it from this book except for the fact that he brings to bear on his task considerable skills from another field: law and forensics. He has learned much, more apparently than most biblical specialists, for all our would-be critical acumen, about the motives and methods of hoaxers and forgers, as well as how to spot them. And he applies them comprehensively, concisely, and convincingly to the case of the *Gospel according to Mort*.

Close inspection of the handwriting shows that the letters are carefully drawn, not spontaneously written. The ink seems to have penetrated the paper, blotting to a degree impossible had the text of the ostensible Clementine letter to Theodore been written close to the time of the publication of the sixteenth-century book in which it appears. The shapes of some of the letters do not match other eighteenth-century handwriting in the Mar Saba manuscripts (*i.e.*, annotations or hand copies of texts made by monkish scribes at the library where Smith claimed to have made his discovery). But they do match perfectly the shapes of the same letters in a twentieth-century scribal hand reproduced by Smith in another publication, writing that appears to be his own, hidden behind a clever pseudonym, Μαδιοτης, not a modern Greek name at all, but rather a pun denoting both “baldy” and “bald-faced liar,” both of which would have applied to Smith if he were dropping hints of his identity as a hoaxer.

The Theodore letter refers to the interpolation of the Secret Mark text by Carpocratian heretics, using the metaphor of the salt losing its savor by adulteration. Trouble is: this image presupposes poured salt that does not clump together, an innovation made only in 1910 by the good folks at, ahem, *Morton* Salt! Plus, it does not appear that salt was ever adulterated in the ancient world; it was already so cheap nobody

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bothered, as they did other food substances. ‘Clement’ cites Jeremiah 28:17, tantalizingly omitting a phrase containing the word “gold*smith*.” So we have *Morton* Salt and a conspicuously absent gold*smith*. This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the Beast, for it is the number of a man.

‘Clement’ also makes a punning catchword linkage between (the rest of) Jeremiah 28:17 (LXX) and Matthew 5:13, a pun, however, that *only works in English*, as both verses, in English translation, use the word *cast*, albeit in different senses, rendering two very different Greek words.

As Quentin Quesnell pointed out forty years ago, the Clementine vocabulary of the letter fragment is not remarkable for a forger working with a copy of the then-newly available concordance to Clement’s writings. But the forger did his work *too* well: the language is *too* Clementine, going to such trouble to use authentic vocabulary that he shortchanged “Clement” on *hapax legomena*,[29] more of which must have appeared, even in so short a writing sample, if it were genuine.

Why does ‘Clement’ quote a nice chunk of the Secret Markan text to Theodore, who ostensibly had his own copy in front of him and only wanted to know if Clement’s copy contained a particular offensive passage (“naked man with naked man”) appealed to by the local Carpocratian carpers? Why doesn’t Clement just say, “No, it’s not there”? He does eventually say it, so why quote the rest? Simply because the letter is a vehicle to smuggle the hoax text before the eyes of the reader.

In his analysis of the text, Smith had claimed to find the depiction of Jesus’ homosexual practice. But the portions of the text, chiefly the phrase, “and he stayed the night with him,” is only employed as a euphemism for a sexual tryst in modern times. And in light of the Secret Markan scene of the naked youth wearing only a sheet approaching Jesus for nocturnal initiation, Smith seemed to want us to read the similarly half-clad youth at Gethsemane as another

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nubile nudist seeking out Jesus for a sexual experience, only to be rounded up by the Gay-bashing cops, led by Judas (whose catty homosexual jealousy I suppose we might infer from his kiss and his betrayal!). But homosexuality was not persecuted in this manner in the ancient world. Rather, it represents the treatment of Gays in 1950s America, at the very time Smith claimed to have discovered *Secret Mark*. Carlson avoids mentioning Smith’s own homosexuality and the hatred he reportedly bore the church for opposing it (of course, in today’s Episcopal Church, Smith would have been made a bishop!).

Smith has Clement and *Secret Mark* combine references to Mark 4:11's "mystery of the kingdom of God," to male homosexuality, and to secret tradition, precisely the same unlikely combination Smith had made in another article, in an entirely different context, about a year earlier. Coincidence? Not likely.

Defenders of Morton Smith have sometimes contended that Smith could not have carried off the forgery in the brief time available to him in the Mar Saba monastery, but Carlson shows that it is more likely that Smith brought the book containing the already-forged Clement/Mark text with him and then planted it in the library. Some say Smith lacked the skills in Greek and the Patristic erudition to carry off such a hoax, but Carlson shows that Smith's previous publications easily belie such a claim, itself reminiscent of claims for illiteracy on the part of Muhammad and Joseph Smith, and for the same reason: to deny them authorship of a piece of scripture.

Carlson is certainly no self-righteous crusader seeking to attack Smith and those who have taken his invention seriously in their own scholarly reconstructions. Unlike crooked parapsychologists who fake lab data to prove their theories since no real evidence is available, Smith never framed a theory based on the Secret Mark text. Even the nonsense he cooked up in *The Secret Gospel* about Jesus being a Gnostic libertine was just window dressing for the hoax. In his own serious work, like *Jesus the Magician*, he never made much of *Secret Mark*. In the last analysis Carlson paints a sympathetic portrait of a mischievous Loki who composed a test

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to see if his scholarly colleagues were worth their salt. Could they follow his trail of crumbs? Were they up to the Higher-Critical task of spotting and proving a spurious text? If not, they deserved to be taken in. If they wind up as embarrassed as Hugh Trevor-Roper who prematurely authenticated the bogus *Hitler Diaries*, they asked for it! Carlson seems to deem it a fair challenge, and any who fell for it ought to be ready to eat crow.

We owe a great debt to Stephen C. Carlson for settling a debate that has simmered for forty years now. Let me put it this way: if anyone, after reading this devastating book, is still inclined to accept Smith's gospel as

a genuine ancient text, then he is only signaling, whether he means to or not, that there are and can be no "assured results of criticism." If this isn't one of them, then there is no such thing.

Brown Nosing[30]

But not everyone is convinced. Scott G. Brown, in *Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery,[31]* mounts a powerful defense of Smith's evangel. He endeavors to rescue the *Secret Gospel of Mark* (which he wants to rechristen *The Longer Gospel of Mark*) from the ignominy of being the fraudulent creation of the late Morton Smith. Then, on the hypothesis that the *Longer Mark* text represents a genuine ancient document, he argues for genuine Markan authorship, proposing that the evangelist in later years undertook to expand his original text for the benefit of more advanced students of the faith. I find myself unconvinced on either count. First, I judge that Stephen C. Carlson has ably refuted Brown's attempt to get Smith off the hook and has pressed the case further, putting Smith's creation of the apocryphon beyond reasonable doubt. Second, I find Brown's attempt to knit the Secret, er, Longer Markan text into Plain Old Mark thematically and stylistically to be a chain of weak links, in spite (or maybe even because) of its ingenuity.

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Again, I refer the reader to Carlson to nail Smith to the cross of forgery. As to that issue, I must make but a few comments. It is intriguing to try to trace out Brown's apologetical strategy. He does not like Charles E. Murgia's observation that the Clementine fragment accompanying the Markan text seems to abound with defensive buffers hinting broadly at the novelty of the new gospel: Clement says it is a secret text, reserved only for the elite, guarded carefully in the church at Alexandria, and available to the heretic Carpocrates only because he deceived or bribed one of the document's guardians.[32] Murgia saw in these assertions a set of anticipatory excuses for the fact that no one till Morton Smith had seen or heard of such a text. How could they, since it was Top Secret even in the ancient world? Murgia saw, rightly, I believe, that these convenient features of Longer Mark are equivalent to the notice at the end of Mark that the holy women told no one about the empty tomb and angelophany, a

transparent bit of imposture intended to answer the carping, “Why didn’t we ever hear about this before now?”

Well, Brown chips away at the secrecy claims every way he can think of, arguing that the word *mystikon* really denotes, in this case, the *mystical* or *symbolic* gospel, and that Morton Smith was wrong in translating it “secret.” Of course, it now should be clear that Smith thought of his invention as “the Secret Gospel” and simply sought the closest Greek word he could find. The case is exactly parallel to that of the fictional *Necronomicon*, the creation of H.P. Lovecraft. He liked the sound of the title, which came to him in a dream, and he doped out its translation as “image of the laws of the dead.” But he didn’t know his Greek well enough. *Necronomicon* is valid Greek, all right, like Manilius’ star book, the *Astronomicon*, but it really should mean, simply, “Concerning the Dead.”[33] An even better parallel would be that of Robert E. Howard’s analogous creation, *Nameless Cults*, ostensibly a blackletter tome in German script. He sought

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a viable German “original,” and fellow writer E. Hoffmann Price suggested *Unenbarren Kulten*, while another colleague, August W. Derleth, suggested *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*. Even though the latter implies something more like “unpronounceable cults,” Howard liked it better. With Morton Smith, too, the ‘translated’ title probably came first, the ‘original’ second.

Brown points out that there were no church buildings in second-century Alexandria, so for the Longer Gospel to be carefully guarded could not have meant it was under lock and key someplace. He says that Smith’s Clement means not that the document conveyed genuine esotericism, but only that it was amenable to allegorical interpretation (what text wasn’t?). For all that, Brown admits it was (one might suggest) like the Jewish Lore of Creation, open only to the learned and devout who were over 40. And that hardly makes it a public text open to the scrutiny of the *psuchikoi* as he seems to want.

Brown says that Smith was mistaken again in inferring the classified character of *Longer Mark* from Clement’s charging his correspondent Theodore to deny even under oath that Mark had written a secret gospel. Brown takes Clement’s words to denote only a denial of

Markan authorship of Carpocratian interpolations, but that cannot be, since Clement justifies his recommended course of action as a white lie: “Not all true things are to be said to all men.”

Brown cannot forgive A.H. Criddle for his argument that the Clementine text sounds *too* Clementine, in the manner of a pastiche or parody. Brown tries to argue that Criddle’s sampling of vocabulary was not representative, but the argument sounds sophistical to me. Likewise Brown’s attempt to defend the Longer Markan text from the charge of sounding too Markan, implying it is a mere textual cento of Markan phrases (which is how it struck me as an untutored teenager in 1973—talk about “reader response”). He points to Mark 4:1–2 as an example of an undisputedly Markan text which has an even higher concentration of Markan signature features and in a much shorter compass. But statistics don’t tell the tale here: who can look at the Secret/Longer Mark text and find it comparable in any way to Mark 4:1–2? As Brown quips in a different context, “As an apologetic tale, it can prove little else” [p. 139].

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As one might expect in a case like this, Brown mounts a frontal assault on what Samuel Sandmel[34] called “parallelomania,” the hasty inference that two texts with some mutual parallels must also be parallel at points no longer discernable, and thus one text depends upon the other. It is a kind of false-analogy fallacy, as well as a hasty generalization, that Sandmel warned of.[35] But parallelomania makes no sense as a charge here. “People who educe vague parallels as evidence that the apocryphal gospels are dependant upon the canonical gospels would do well to remember that the same procedure has been used to argue that the Gospel of Mark is a refashioning of myths derived from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* and that the Gospel of John is the product of a Near Eastern form of Buddhism. The listing of trivial, inexact parallels is the *sine qua non* of improbable theories of literary dependence” [p. 94]. Who said anything about trivial or inexact parallels? Virtually every phrase of the *Secret Gospel* pericope about quasi-Lazarus (may we call him Quazarus?) can be pinned down like a specimen insect onto some page of a gospel harmony.

One is especially surprised to hear Brown, who rightly suspects canon apologetics to lie beneath scholarly indifference toward ‘heretical’ texts, to dismiss with a snicker these theories of Homeric or Buddhist

influence on the gospels. Both sources were readily available in the gospel-composing milieu. I cannot guess what is supposed to make such theories automatically absurd, unless it is their uncomfortable heterodoxy.

Brown[36] rightly takes me to the woodshed for my careless imprecision in confusing characters in the evangelical spy-novel *The Mystery of Mar Saba*,[37] which I (lamentably ignorant that Philip

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Jenkins[38] had already pointed out the connection) once suggested[39] inspired Smith's hoax. But this sloppiness on my part in no way affects my (*i.e.*, Jenkins's) main contention. And it is gratuitous necromancy that assures Brown that Smith would certainly never have wasted his time reading a trashy novel like *The Mystery of Mar Saba*. On the contrary, I suggest that such a novel is exactly the sort of leisure fiction to appeal to scholars like Smith.[40]

Essentially, Brown's argument much resembles Latter-day Saint apologetics on behalf of the Book of Mormon. That text is obviously a modern pastiche of readily identifiable scriptural snippets, like a ransom note in a movie, composed of disparate sentence fragments cut from magazine pages and pasted together. Brown's arguments are misdirection strategies. Specifically, his attempts to drive a wedge between Smith's own scholarly "surmises" on the Secret Gospel and what the Greek text actually says (or can be made to say) recall the disparity between the Book of Mormon, with its crude Patripassianism, and the baroque, polytheistic theology that Joseph Smith and others later hung on it like ornaments on a Christmas tree.

Morton Smith never made much of the gospel he had 'discovered.' He avoided basing his serious scholarly hypotheses upon it, leaving other scholars to do with it as they pleased. But this doesn't mean he didn't write the text. No, his point was to toss an apple of discord onto the scholarly seminar table. The more seriously scholars took it, the more fun Smith had. He could hardly overrule them on the meaning of the text without betraying his authorship of it. It was a *Candid Camera* stunt, and it would have ruined it for him to intervene. He knew better than to base any serious work upon it, so he didn't. That would have vitiated his serious

work (like *Jesus the Magician*). What he wanted was to dupe other scholars into taking his hoax seriously

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and basing *their* work on it. I should say that Brown has fallen for it, and the very sophistication of his analysis is precisely the sort of sophistry Smith wanted to tempt forth and laugh at.

And here is a further piece of irony occasioned by Brown's sneering dismissal of 'unclean' theories of Buddhist and Homeric influence on the gospels: such theories do certainly demonstrate how one may prove *anything* with enough ingenuity. In saying this, I do not mean to agree with Brown that these theories are absurd. They are not. Nor is his (or it wouldn't have been, before Carlson wrote). But that's just the trouble: an embarrassment of riches. The clever exegetical dancing on display in all such theories should mitigate the seriousness with which any of their proponents urge us to take them.

Putting, as he supposes, behind him the question of the genuine antiquity of the text, Brown goes on to demonstrate the integrity of the text of *Longer Mark* with that of Plain Old Mark. He argues that the Quazarus resurrection pericope plus the later note that Jesus subsequently snubbed the lad's mother and her friends, including Salome, forms one of Mark's famous 'sandwiches.' Brown sees it as intercalated with the comical episode of the Sons of Dunder, James and John, putting dibs on the seats of honor at Jesus' coronation feast. Smith/Clement placed the two Secret Gospel passages on the left and right hands of Mark 10:35–45. But do they and the James-John pericope mutually interpret one another as the other famous half-dozen sandwich constructions do? Brown contends that they do, and that they thus qualify as the seventh set. But against this conclusion four serious objections occur to me.

First, the second section of *Secret Mark* merely refers to the first, identifying one of the Ya-ya Sisterhood with Quazarus' mother. There is no other apparent connection I can see. It does not form a sequel much less a conclusion to the Quazarus scene. It is not a second piece of bread in a sandwich, like the second half [Mark 5:35–43] of the story of Jairus' daughter [Mark 5:21b–24a].

Second, despite Brown's contention that ancient critics/scribes would likely never have recognized the sandwiching technique (and

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thus would never have thought to imitate it), one must point out that Matthew certainly recognized it, since he took the trouble to undo it! For him the fig tree tantrum and the temple cleansing are two separate events. The visit of Jesus' relatives has no longer anything to do with the Beelzebul controversy.

Third, Brown admits that the original text makes plenty of sense as Mark first wrote it: with the James and John episode standing on its own. So how integrally can it belong to its present context in *Longer Mark*? If the Secret Markan material makes sense as a secondary interpolation, it can't be invoked as if some kind of missing piece of the puzzle. I can't see that there is any puzzle here to solve.

Fourth, the intercalated lesson Brown finds in Longer Mark depends upon a contrast between the grandiose chest-thumpers James and John, who utterly fail to grasp the true nature of discipleship, and the resurrected Quazarus, who reappears in the same skimpy garb, apparently a symbolic baptism costume, in the Garden of Gethsemane. But since he flees ignominiously from that scene as swiftly as the most lily-livered of the Twelve, there is not much contrast that I can see. So *what* if he also appears in the empty tomb at the end? That's not supposed to be part of the sandwich. Unless it's one of those long party sandwiches. Plus, how can we be sure that young Quazarus is even supposed to be the same as the Gethsemane streaker (as Brown calls him—bravo!), or that either of them is supposed to be the angel incognito at the tomb? Brown admits that with the Plain Old version of Mark, there is not sufficient reason to identify the streaker with the man in the tomb, and that it is only the Longer text that clinches it. *How*? That's what I'd like to know.

But the plane crashes with a climactic anticlimax: what Brown offers us as the supposedly advanced, deeper truth of the elite gospel turns out to be the same as the theme constantly reiterated throughout Plain Old Mark: the way of the Kingdom of God and sharing its glory is the way of self-abnegation, martyrdom if need be, here and now. This is deeper teaching? This was kept from Joe Q. Catechumen? How can any reader of Plain Old Mark have avoided

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it? “What LGM 1 and 2 do is deepen a reader’s appreciation of this gospel’s Christology and discipleship theology” [p. 216]. What vapid euphemism! This hardly amounts to a “heightened esotericism” (*ibid*.). The mountain labored to bring forth Mickey Mouse. Why all this trouble for so meager a result? I suspect that it is part of Brown’s larger apologetical agenda: if the ‘Longer gospel’ were really a secret gospel, if it had real secrets, a genuine Gnostic, esoteric dimension, then it would lend itself more readily to the theory that Smith concocted it as an embarrassment to orthodox Christianity. And that Brown will not have. But one fears that, in the wake of Carlson’s *The Gospel Hoax*, Brown’s efforts have been rendered as Quixotic as those of ‘Sindonologists’ after the Carbon 14 dating of the Turin Shroud.

The Secret of the Secret Gospel[41]

Stephen C. Carlson’s *Gospel Hoax* adequately demonstrated the spurious character of Morton Smith’s pet pseudepigraphon the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. Carlson’s forensic approach requires no supplementation. But then again it is nice to have two or three witnesses to establish a testimony. And musicologist / liturgiologist Peter Jeffery has ‘sung’ like Joe Valachi. In *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled: Imagined Rituals of Sex, Death, and Madness in a Biblical Forgery[42]* Jeffery shows that both the *Secret Gospel*/*Epistle of Clement* text and Smith’s scholarly discussion of it are riddled with cultural anachronisms, which however do more than show us the fallacy of the historical connection the text claims: they open the way for situating the project in the era from which it actually stemmed. In this Jeffery fires the same double-barreled shot as the Shroud debunkers. Joe Nickell’s researches[43] show not only that the Turin Shroud is not a relic of the first century CE, but that it is rather a product of the fourteenth—precisely matching the date of the Shroud’s confessed but unheeded forger. Even so, Jeffery shows that

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the liturgical background which the Clement letter presupposes for the church of Alexandria does not square with what we know about early Church liturgy there or anywhere else. Instead, it seems to reflect Episcopalian reconstructions of early baptism popular among Prayer Book

reformists in the 1950s—just the time Episcopalian Smith was working on the *Secret Gospel*.

Likewise, the hints of homosexual practice in the *Secret Gospel* (the implied relationship between Jesus and the young man, or *Quazarus*, as I like to call him) does not fit the options available for homosexual tutelage familiar from the ancient world, but appears to reflect that of the age and culture when Smith was writing. Among the ancients, as far as we know, the older partner initiated the affair, whereas the *Secret Gospel* seems to have the young man cry out ("Come hither"?) to Jesus.

In addition, Smith's earlier and later accounts of his two stays at the Mar Saba monastery seem to have been confused. When he first visited, he was, to hear him tell it, an enthusiastic seminarian eager to participate in the liturgy. By his second sojourn there he had lost his faith. Yet he slips and remarks how his attendance at the services the first time around was merely aesthetic, since he did not share the monks' faith. The confusion matters because it is only in the memoir of the later visit that he claims to have experienced the mind-altering character of the holy service, and that it inspired his reconstruction of the *Sitz-im-Leben* of Secret Mark as part of a mystery rite of ecstatic ascension. But he was ostensibly no longer open to such experiences on the visit in which the liturgy would have abetted his interpretation of the Secret Gospel. It looks like he was faking his later recollection of pious transport.

Jeffery examines a number of Smith's writings that would not at first seem to bear on the Secret Mark controversy. He shows how Smith seems to have embraced an extreme version of the Anglo-Catholic 'Branch theory' whereby Anglicanism, Orthodoxy, and Catholicism, by token of the apostolic succession of bishops, were all really Catholic. This allowed him to embrace extreme versions of Catholic moralism out of step with contemporary Catholic pastoral/penitential theory,

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especially with regard to homosexual practice. Smith, it seems, was constructing a straw-man of a merciless Christian/Catholic Church, virtually synonymous with Christianity *per se*, which exacted rigorous asceticism on earth (*e.g.*, suppression of homoerotic instincts) as the price of eternal bliss in heaven. All this was a running start for him to abandon Christian faith and to seek revenge upon it in oblique, scholarly ways. And

though Jeffery is discreet, it is plainly implied that it was the discovery of homosexuality and its overwhelming ecstasies that made Smith turn the corner and, in the end, to try to "correct" the wrong turn Christian moral theology had long ago made. What if the authentic teaching of Jesus had been preserved best by libertine Gnostics? What if the very essence of Christian initiation were actually homosexual encounter with one's Lord? "Oh, he walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own, and the joy we share as we tarry there no other has ever known."

As Jeffery wisely notes, it was this concern to claim the historical Jesus for homosexuality that forced Smith to ignore more promising, more modest scholarly approaches, *e.g.*, arguing merely for a Gnostic provenance for his text. No, that wouldn't have been good enough. It had to be Jesus himself. And this desire necessitated Smith's grand hypothesis of early Christianity's origin as a libertine Gnostic-Hekhaloth cult.[44] Instead of documenting these claims, Smith merely proof-texted them. All he was finally able to do was to show that a number of the required dots had once existed (visionary ascents, libertinisms, baptismal rites, *etc.*), but he could find nothing to support the particular way in which he connected them. Why embark upon such a project, a whole new etiology for the Christian religion, based on one small fragment? Clearly it was to serve a larger polemical agenda. You don't need Smith's reconstruction in order to understand the text; you only need it if you are trying to bulldoze a path amid the scattered evidence to a desired conclusion: this was the historical Jesus.

Jeffery shows how detail after detail of the Clement letter and the *Secret Gospel* make the best, natural sense when viewed in light

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of a particular English University homosexual culture ('Uranianism,' overlapping the Cambridge Apostles) that read its own sexuality back into Plato and the Classics, and of other nineteenth-twentieth century ecclesiastical conflicts interesting to Smith. For instance, Smith once referred to a long debate over a passage in Cardinal Newman where some took him to mean it was permissible to tell untruths for the benefit of the unenlightened, appealing in the process to Clement of Alexandria. It is no surprise, then, that Smith 'discovers' a letter from Clement, of all people,

in which he offers precisely such advice: one must deny under oath any knowledge of *Secret Mark* and its authorship.

Uranianism despised women, and so Smith's Jesus rebuffs the women who approach him. One of these is Salome, whom we are at first to identify with the gospel character, one of Jesus' followers. But Smith was really hinting of Salome, the daughter of Herodias, whose female arts led to the decapitation of the Baptist. Oscar Wilde had her dance the dance of the seven veils, and what do you know? Smith's Clement says the Markan Secret is to be hidden behind seven veils. Uranian culture despised Christian moralists as stinking hypocrites for condemning a higher, purer sexuality between men. And this is how the Clement letter depicts Clement and his lying church, which not only prevaricates about possessing the *Secret Gospel* but harrumphs about the sexual liberation it preaches. Jeffery shows how we are to understand Smith's Clement as an "unreliable narrator." We are to see him as the villain, his Carpocratian targets as the heroes. Indeed, I would take a step further in Jeffery's direction: I think Smith, having established his Clement as a priestcraftian liar, intends us to discount Clement's protests that the juiciest portions of Secret Mark are heretical interpolations. The implication (used as a distancing device) is that Theodore is himself not yet ready for the fullest version of the truth, including homosexual initiation, and so Clement lies to him about the true extent of Secret Mark's arcana. Smith intends that Clement possessed the same gay text as the Carpocratians, but for the moment he must hide the fact behind the veneer of churchly faith, which is all Theodore has yet attained to.

When we learn from Jeffery that Wilde and others of the English Uranians often composed scripture pastiches to satirize the New

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Testament, the case is closed. Smith is now seen to have followed the same practice. Some had even argued that Jesus was the gay lover of the Beloved Disciple and that the naked man fleeing Gethsemane was his rival for Jesus' affections. This is the secret of the *Secret Gospel*.

Well, one must congratulate Morton Smith on attaining his goal, at least in large measure. He did manage to become one of the New Testament writers, albeit like one born out of season. For from now on, his *Secret Mark* will ever hold a place on the margin of the canon, a tenuous

member of Eusebius' fourth scripture category: heretical forgeries wrongly accepted as apostolic by some.

Luke's Look at Jesus[45]

Friedrich Schleiermacher was a titan of nineteenth-century theology and New Testament criticism. In some ways we have yet to catch up with him. In other respects, his work bears the clinging bands of their time which make it seem anachronistic to modern readers. And Schleiermacher is, as he deserves to be, still widely read and studied. Terence N. Tice has provided an augmented reprinting of Schleiermacher's 1825 *A Critical Essay on the Gospel of St. Luke*,[46] itself a translation of *Über die Schriften des Lukas* (1817). Schleiermacher's own source-critical monograph on Luke forms the inmost of three concentric circles, with translator Connop Thirlwall's introductory essay and editor Tice's Introduction, Appendices and Apparatus surrounding it. Each growth ring of this mighty tree will repay study. The reader, understandably eager to plunge right into Schleiermacher's deliberations, will be well advised nonetheless to pause and linger over the surrounding Mishnah and Gemara.

We live in a time when the great work of the classic critics seems mostly swept beneath the rug of comfortable conventionalism. We do not so much assume the insights of earlier generations as we feel

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entitled to forget them and the questions they raised, the directions they set. Thus the vital importance of reissuing works like this one. They enable yesterday's voices to speak afresh to new climates, some eerily similar to those in which the works were first issued. And indeed it will become evident that Schleiermacher's study still has much to say to us.

Terrence N. Tice has long been one of the great advocates of Schleiermacher study, and we already owe him a great debt for his previous work in the field. Indeed, one of the strengths of this new edition is the helpful scholarly aids Tice has provided for use not only in connection with Schleiermacher's *Luke*, but with previous Schleiermacher translations as well. He has compiled, for example, an index to scholars cited in the *Life of Jesus*,[47] which for some reason lacked it. There is

also a cross-referencing system between Lukan references in this monograph and those in Schleiermacher's sermons as well as in the *Life of Jesus*.

More important still is the placing of the work of Schleiermacher and Thirlwall in their historical and theological context. It is not so much that any of Schleiermacher's insights into Luke are thus enhanced (though sometimes they are) as that Tice thus enables us to look through Luke as a window into the early nineteenth century and the dawn of the Higher Criticism. With a genuine sensitivity to Schleiermacher's own later hermeneutical program, that subsequently taken up by Wilhelm Dilthey, [48] Tice treats the Lukan monograph not only as a lamp illuminating the biblical text but also as an expression of the human spirit, a monument of a particular culture, in a particular fascinating period of history. And despite the criticisms to which Schleiermacher's later 'psychological hermeneutic' has been subjected, Tice shows how the reader in a later day may indeed enter into the sensibility and mindset of an earlier century. The Schleiermacher text, with Tice's polishing, is thus able to function both as mirror and as window. It raises the

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question of which the monograph is "really" about: Luke's gospel or Schleiermacher and his world. Of course, the answer is both.

Translator Connop Thirlwall, himself a remarkable figure whose biography Tice has gone to the trouble to provide in engaging detail, seeks in his essay to relate Schleiermacher's observations to a wider variety of then-contemporary critical hypotheses, some of them home-grown in England and thus not treated by Schleiermacher. Thirlwall also treats a veritable Valhalla of forgotten theories about the gospels, the most intriguing of which, however, are German hypotheses, those of Gieseler, Eichhorn, and Semler. These are theories mostly forgotten today, though here and there their vestiges and echoes are still evident. And Thirlwall's discussion sheds interesting light on these latter-day traces.

Much of his essay is taken up with a scrutiny of various opinions on whether the sources for the canonical gospels were primarily written or oral. Among the former is the theory of Gieseler that the Synoptic Gospels are based directly on oral tradition of the preaching of the apostles which naturally and spontaneously attained eventual standardized form.

Eichhorn, on the other hand, posited one original written gospel outlining the most important words and deeds of Christ, drawn up by the apostles for use in preaching the gospel. The extent of this proto-gospel Eichhorn determined by extracting the overlapping portions of the gospels. Both Thirlwall and Schleiermacher return to this theory again and again, demonstrating amply that it answers nothing and only raises more questions.

Mere mention is made of Semler's interesting theory that the Synoptic Gospels once existed in less similar forms and that their present extent of agreement is the artificial yet accidental product of the assimilating tendencies of scribes. Textual evidence of such assimilation, *e.g.*, of Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer to Matthew's, represents only the tip of the iceberg. Most of the mischief would have been done in the textual tunnel-period from which no evidence survives.

To those of us who are comfortable with currently popular theories of Synoptic relations, whether the Mark-Q paradigm (as I am) or the Griesbach-Farmer paradigm, Thirlwall's deliberations

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can be quite arresting. These old theories may seem like false starts, failed attempts clearing the way for our own favorite theory, but one wonders, for instance, if there might be some real value in applying some of these considerations to the Gospel of Thomas, where scholars seem to rehearse some of the same points and still cannot agree whether Thomas represents an independent oral tradition or rather some sort of memory-quote assimilation of half-remembered gospel readings, or even loose rewriting of Luke and/or Matthew, or some combination of all these possibilities.

One irony in contemporary gospel scholarship becomes evident in Thirlwall's tour of the Elephant's Graveyard of critical theories, and that is that some scholars have somehow wound up combining incompatible bits and pieces of otherwise forgotten hypotheses. Many evangelical scholars have embraced the Mark-Q hypothesis, while sticking to an over-optimistic estimate of the fidelity of oral tradition that would make the Mark-Q solution superfluous. The latter model seemed necessary, as even conservative evangelical accounts of it make quite clear, only because, as Thirlwall observes, it just seems impossible for long oral transmission to preserve verbatim sameness for very long. Two texts as similar down to

the wording as Matthew and Luke are must have common written sources, the theory runs, because such similarity could never survive spontaneous oral repetition. And yet, when in the apologetical mode, the same scholars defend the notion of near-perfect word-of-mouth transmission of gospel pericopae for decades until Mark. But then whence the need for written sources behind and between our gospels?

Indeed both Thirlwall and Schleiermacher, in criticizing theories that the gospels enshrine the tradition of the preaching of the apostles, have occasion for many remarks that might be taken just as seriously today in evaluating not only the apologetics of R.T. France,[49] I. Howard Marshall,[50] George E. Ladd,[51] and others, but the suggestions

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of Riesenfeld[52] and Gerhardsson[53] as well. Is it really likely that the first apostles busied themselves with providing materials for later historians and apologists? Why recount the events of the life of Jesus at all when presumably these were fresh in people's minds? And as Schleiermacher notes, it would make much more sense to locate the gathering of the Jesus-tradition as precisely by those who were *not* eye-witnesses and did *not* know what had happened before the cross and resurrection. (And of course by the same token they would hardly be in a position to evaluate what they heard.)

Riesenfeld and Gerhardsson thought that perhaps the gospel tradition stemmed from the circle of Jesus' apostles who "like a plastered cistern, lost not a drop" of the teaching committed to them, on analogy with the practices attested for somewhat later rabbis. Many criticisms of this theory are well known, but to them we may add the observation that the sheer volume of the sayings and stories clustered about the name of Jesus should invalidate the rabbinic analogy. Most of the rabbis are credited with a very few memorable gnomoi, a few apophthegms. Jesus is instead like Solomon, a figurehead name to which any wise saying might be attributed. This alone ought to make us seek some other *Sitz-im-Leben* for the sayings, shouldn't it?

As Thirlwall notes, Gieseler's theory of oral tradition as the direct source of the gospels entails what it tries to avoid: the idea that the gospel pericopae were the distillation of a careful process of artificial and conventional standardization. Only by eventual appeal to liturgical,

formulaic transmission of tradition could Gieseler make accurate oral transmission look likely. But then his point (and one would think that of today's maximal conservative apologists as well) is sunk: such formulae are already at a far remove from the vivid recollections of the great by their associates. They are sacred lore.

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It is really a simple point of form-criticism: do genuine recollections and bits of table-talk look like what we see in the gospels? Like D.E. Nineham, [54] I cannot bring myself to think so (though, as we will see, Schleiermacher could).

Even if we suppose the extant gospel formulae/pericopae to represent a reduction from living memory, how are we to envision this process? Whose recollection or recounting, among many available, was chosen for the norm? Whose became the official version? And once there *is* a single official version, you are no longer talking about real oral history, memory reports. Surely the transition from living memory to short pericope-units is a more wrenching mutation than that from orality to writing outlined by Werner Kelber.[55] Flesh is made word. The transition from the buzzing chaos of the lived world dies away into artificial, unidirectional simplicity when we embalm the facts in a narrative world.

Schleiermacher's own attempt at a solution to the Synoptic problem was a creative *via media* between Gieseler and today's theories that some of our extant gospels used each other (Schleiermacher knew and rejected some such theories). He envisions and endeavors to solve a miniature Synoptic problem with every set of matching pericopes. There may be a different solution every time, with different combinations of various written reports available to each evangelist, some better accounts, some inferior, at each point in the narrative. Schleiermacher envisions a process whereby the amino acids of oral tradition, some from eye-witnesses, some at a further remove, first formed unicellular organisms (individual written episodes). Some of these then formed multicellular creatures, so to speak, when they were collected thematically (Luke's Central Section, the journey to Jerusalem, being one such transitional form). The canonical evangelists then collected these bits and short digests, shaping them into final form, the gospel

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species seen today. In his view, Luke had both the best sources and the best historical judgment, with the result that his gospel is nearly the equal of the eye-witness gospel (as he deemed it) of John.

Schleiermacher's highly dubious results notwithstanding, his general manner of procedure may yet commend itself to our use, the more as some of us become less certain of any current Synoptic solution. He is essentially paralleling the procedure of eclectic text critics who give exclusive preference to no one manuscript or family thereof, but rather judge each variant reading on its own seeming merits. Perhaps, agnostic about inter-synoptic relations, we may one day settle on this procedure. We may deem this or that particular gospel as generally superior (as Schleiermacher preferred Luke) but remain open to the possibility that Matthew's version of, say, the fig tree story, is superior to Mark's. The oldest version of Peter's confession may survive, perhaps, in John 6:69.

Everywhere intermingled with his source-critical judgments is Schleiermacher's tendency toward historicization and harmonization. Like Strauss in *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, Schleiermacher is found to be fighting on two fronts, defining his approach against traditional orthodox exegetes on the one hand and Rationalists like Paulus on the other. Though he avoids the most extreme excesses of both, it may be startling to today's reader how far he will stretch to justify a piece of gospel tradition as an authentic account from the life of Jesus. But unlike his Rationalist and orthodox competitors, it is only Luke whom Schleiermacher repeatedly vindicates, not all the gospels.

Unable to bring himself to dismiss either John or Luke, convinced that each embodies reliable tradition for all their differences, Schleiermacher actually resorts to the expedient of two Triumphal Entries. And though today few quail at admitting that the Sermon on the Mount/Plain is a redactional compilation already in Q (and thus, one might suppose, just the same sort of pre-gospel collection Schleiermacher himself posits for the Lukan Central Section),[56] Schleiermacher cannot bear to part with it as a genuine

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discourse, since that would make Luke's chronology artificial. So he admits the composite nature of the speech but makes it a genuine digest

compiled and recited by Jesus himself, who is envisioned as reminding the crowd of his most important teachings, a Jesus-Deuteronomy.

Schleiermacher stands closer to Gieseler than one might at first expect. (Thirlwall in a letter to Julius Hare: “There is so much appearance of truth in both their arguments that I should be unwilling to think them incompatible.” p. 337) In every case Schleiermacher prefers the Lukan to the Markan and Matthean versions, assuming each used different parallel “reports” (though sometimes the same ones, hence their occasional verbatim agreements), not simply because one has “more primitive tradition,” as more recent critics are wont to say, but rather because, he is sure, Luke’s reports are choice accounts of well-positioned eye-witnesses, while Matthew’s are not. For instance, Luke’s account of the Gerasene demoniac is superior to Matthew’s because it must stem from one of Jesus’ companions who accompanied him all the way to shore, while Matthew’s derives from the account of one left sitting in the boat!

In such sometimes unwittingly hilarious reconstructions one can perhaps trace a trajectory all the way back to the special pleading of the orthodox apologists, still alive and well today: all the gospels present us with eye-witness testimony, their differences being understandable as analogous to the perspectival differences of various witnesses to an auto accident. Schleiermacher wanted to stick as close as he could to eyewitness origins for the gospel traditions. None of the evangelists is too far wrong, and his chiefest criticism of Matthew and Mark is that they have mixed up the true sequence of events.

Once one sees in Schleiermacher such a vital survival of the harmonizing tendency of the apologists, it becomes easier to detect it in later critics like T.W. Manson and A.M. Hunter, who sought to ameliorate the implications of German criticism by a steadfast

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tendency to invoke source criticism to keep redaction criticism at bay. Manson almost always preferred to chalk up a difference between Mark and Matthew to a different M tradition that Matthew preferred to Mark, rather than seeing it as a free alteration of one evangelist by another. This way, faced only with a relatively innocent divergence between ‘variant traditions,’ the door might be left open to the ‘perspectival’ harmonization technique used by Schleiermacher and the apologists. Poor ‘M’ was

perhaps no less an eye-witness than Mark's informant, he had just stepped out to the privy and missed something. Or like the Sadducee standing at the edge of the crowd in *Monty Python's Life of Brian,* he thought he heard "Blessed are the cheese-makers."

Schleiermacher had intended the present monograph as volume one of a study "of the writings of Luke," but like the fabled sequel to Acts in which Luke would have gotten round to the death of Paul, Schleiermacher did not get to complete the project. And yet we are often reminded of Acts in these pages. Schleiermacher's treatment of the Central Section of Luke is startlingly reminiscent of the theory of a 'We-Source' in Acts. By this device Schleiermacher is able to attribute most of the material in this section to an eye-witness, defending even the improbable chronology which has Jesus taking weeks to make the short journey. Whenever he hits a stubborn snag he retreats to the explanation that the reporter was temporarily absent and that either he or Luke himself had to fill in the gaps from hearsay. In light of the work of Vernon K. Robbins,[57] who adequately accounts for the 'we' passages in Acts as a convention of ancient sea-voyage narratives, may we not recognize and dismiss the tired old 'We-Source' as another harmonizing device of the same type?

Anyone who expects to read in this book a commentary on Luke will be disappointed. That is not Schleiermacher's goal at all. He is engaged in what we would call source criticism, and the ultimate aim of his efforts is to vindicate the superiority of Luke as the next best thing to an eye-witness account. What exposition there is of the meaning of

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individual passages is that made necessary in order to historicize, to make the saying or story seem to fit into the day's events as Luke lists them. The results can be quite surprising, as when Schleiermacher makes the saying about those who enter the Kingdom of God violently into a criticism of the Pharisees who supposedly sought, in order to facilitate the advent of the Kingdom of God as they understand it (nationalistically), to make an alliance with Herod Antipas by closing an eye to his violence against the divorce commandment. This is the only way Schleiermacher can rationalize the sequence of the woe on the Pharisees [16:14–15], the saying about John as the launch pad of the Kingdom [v. 16], that about the eternal endurance of the Law [v. 17], and the saying on divorce [v. 18].

Schleiermacher once [p. 234] notes that the ironing out of sequential difficulties admittedly has no bearing on the meaning of a pericope in its own right, but in fact it would seem to have everything to do with it. “It must after all be left to the reader’s feeling, after these hints, to conceive the unity which exists in this passage, and to form a lively idea of the way in which all this may have been spoken consecutively” [p. 196]. And in so conceiving we may be construing the text to mean all kinds of things no one of the pericopae by itself would ever suggest. Here I think Schleiermacher has proven himself the precursor of modern Reader-Response criticism. Schleiermacher the reader has become a collaborator with Luke in telling a new story, connecting the dots that Luke left unconnected. And Schleiermacher, like Wolfgang Iser,[58] invites every reader to do the same.

As a literary critic, then, Schleiermacher was perhaps far ahead of his time. But as a historian the same may not be said of him. Though it is true that Schleiermacher was an ideal practitioner of Collingwood’s historical method in that he sought in his researches to reconstruct the mental operation of the ancient author/compiler, to think his thoughts after him, in another important sense Schleiermacher seems to me to have remained at Collingwood’s

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pre-modern stage of historiography, ‘scissors and paste’ history-writing. Here the historian has come to the point of realizing that his sources cannot simply command his assent. He must cross-examine them first; only after he does, he still yields credulity to those left standing, believing himself to have at least plausibly identified the true ‘authorities’ and to have eliminated the spurious ones, like the Corinthians whom Paul exhorted to reject false apostles but to obey the true one implicitly. Schleiermacher satisfies himself that he need not take Matthew and Mark over-seriously, but he swears fealty to John and to Luke, and to the specific reports Luke wisely chose to incorporate. These he proceeds to use as sturdy building blocks for constructing a historical Jesus (as we see in his *Life of Jesus*). He begins to harmonize, industriously applying as much mortar of historicizing explanation as needed to fill the gaps between the bricks.

Strauss and Bultmann later would come to Collingwood's stage of genuinely critical history-writing. For them no gospel pericope or source is anything but a bit of data construed as 'evidence for' whatever the historian decides it is evidence for. He construes a composite picture of the past, derived from a kind of hermeneutical circling between paradigms and evidence, each revising the other. Schleiermacher, it is true, seeks to fit the gospel pericopae into the working pattern of a past-picture as Collingwood says, but it is that handed him by the gospels read at face value: here is the life of Jesus. It seemingly does not occur to him to doubt their word as historical authorities. By contrast, Bultmann and the form-critics would see that, despite the overt claim of the texts to inform us about the life and teaching of Jesus, they are really telling us about the disputes and the life and faith of the early Jesus movement. The texts are no longer authorities to be taken at face value, none of them.

Schleiermacher tries ingeniously to reconstruct a *Sitz-im-Leben Jesu* for every passage whose authority he acknowledges. So the gospel version he finds easiest to use for this purpose, Luke's, he deems closest to an eye-witness authority. But, again, he is only able to proceed by harmonizing historicization. Thus he is still bound

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with the chain that constricted the Rationalist Paulus[59] more closely: Schleiermacher must still save the appearances of the gospel stories, though no longer is he bound to save all of them. And he does not resort to rationalizing the miracles in Paulus's style. He prefers to posit the unwitting concretizing of poetry or parable—and yet in *The Life of Jesus* he does opt for the *Scheintod* or Swoon Theory. What he cannot yet bring himself to see is that the proper home of the gospel materials is the *Sitz-im-Leben Kirche*.

Ironically, it is just what limits Schleiermacher as a historical critic that makes him appear so much like the post-historical-critical literary critics of our own day. The search for the original historical *Zusammenhang* (connection/context) is abandoned (in Schleiermacher's case, simply unsuspected), and the reader-critic proceeds instead to a midrashic rewriting of the text, supplying his own connections and (sometimes, it is to be feared) confusing the result with the author's intent.

Journeys with Johnny[60]

Veteran scholar Robert Kysar provides a compendium of notable articles and papers in his *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel*. [61] Kysar's collection, with its retrospective introductions, reminds me of Stanley Fish's wonderful collection of essays *Is There a Text in this Class? [62]* In both one not only reads several essays of considerable interest in their own right, but also one experiences Paul de Man's dialectic of "blindness and insight,"[63] the process by

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which, ironically, certain insights are acquired at one point that would not have been possible after one had gained further knowledge later. Only one's earlier, more limited, perspective allowed certain things to be seen at all. And in *Voyages with John*, we get to participate with Professor Kysar in his voyage of Johannine exploration. We follow him as he labors in the vineyard of historical criticism, then in source and redactional criticism, then in literary and narratological criticism, leading into postmodern readings of the Fourth Gospel. Fascinating!

Reading Dr. Kysar's attempts at Reader-Response criticism, I begin to suspect, as I do with most so-called New Testament narratology (unlike the real thing as practiced by Gerard Genette[64] and Seymour Chatman), [65] that there is a lot less here than meets the eye. Kysar's attempt at putting himself in the place of a first-time (*i.e.*, non-jaded) reader of John is unspectacular. The roadblocks and flashes of insight he predicates of the unspoiled reader do not seem much different from those that break upon the awareness of well-versed John-readers elsewhere in this book or in others.[66] Who *isn't* stuck wondering what 'birth from above' might mean? The watch-

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me-read-this gimmick gets old fast, which it wouldn't if we were really learning anything from it. The whole discussion reminds me of the man who says, "I'm going over to the wall to flip the light switch. Now I've reached the switch. I'm turning it off. So now I've switched the light off. I just switched the light off." This 'method' produces only a one-step-back double focus on the reader as well as the text. But all we are seeing of the reader is what he makes of the text. It is not much different from what

happens in a TV news interview in which the camera is focused most of the time on the interviewee but now and then switches for a second to provide a glimpse of the interviewer gravely nodding his head as he listens. The goal of narratology, as I understand it, is to break the spell of the text's rhetoric, explaining how it seduces the reader. It is like explaining how a stage conjurer's tricks work. The reader is henceforth forewarned and forearmed, as well as newly appreciative of the writer's 'magical' skills. It is all a sub-set of Derrida's Deconstruction project, laying bare the illusory immediacy of rhetoric which poses as telepathy, a medium for the immediate communication of meaning. But I haven't seen much of that in New Testament narratology, whose practitioners seem to think they have accomplished something by providing a *Cliff's Notes* summary of this or that gospel.

In case it is not already evident, I, as a historical critic, find Kysar's turn to Reader-Response criticism a bit disappointing. He has seemingly given up on finding answers and is content with framing questions. For instance, in the essay on the Bread of Life discourse [John 6], Dr. Kysar confesses himself surprised at the seemingly inconsistent enumeration of the interlocutors of Jesus in that passage. They appear at first to be sincere seekers, until, that is, Jesus accuses them of being a bunch of free-lunch welfare abusers. But then they also seem to be the horned "Jews" vilified everywhere else in the Gospel of John, people who never had any thought but to kill Jesus as soon as possible. But then they seem to morph into the disciples. And then we learn that, though this inner core/corps is all predestined by God to come to Jesus, one of them (Judas Iscariot) is in fact, as Elvis would say, "a devil in disguise." What gives? Dr. Kysar then receives the text as something of an analogue (though he does

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not draw the parallel) to the Markan parable of the Sower/Soils: he takes the instability of the categories of Jesus' interlocutors as an object lesson. The reader must not be too secure in his imagined faith: has God really drawn him to Jesus any more than he did the free-lunchers? Though the reader may consider himself a disciple, may he also be a devil, not yet disclosed? All right, that is an edifying, almost a homiletical, exercise.

But I still want to explain the wild careening between categories of interlocutors. And then other parallels come to mind. Don't we have the

same difficulty identifying Paul's 'opponents' in various letters? Who is he upset about, for instance, in Galatians? Gnostics? Judaizers? Gnostic Judaizers? Republicans? Vegans? Flat-taxers? It is so hard to frame a coherent police artist sketch of them that Van Manen and the Dutch Radicals were driven to conclude there are no genuine historical entities in view, but that these (actually post-Pauline) texts are just firing scattershot at a whole syllabus of contemporary (late-first, early second-century) errors. The 'historical scene of writing' in Paul's day for which we had sought was an illusion. Likewise, it seems quite likely to me that John 6 does not care who we envision Jesus debating with. He is not trying for a coherent character portrait of Jesus' interlocutors, whether as an historical report or as a bit of literary verisimilitude. He just has some business to get done: he wants to define certain Christological and sacramental stances, and in order to do so, he needs voices from the audience proposing errors so as to allow him to have Jesus refute them and clarify the truth (= the evangelist's view). Some false ideas might fit naïve sympathizers best, while others would make more sense coming from a dyed-in-the-wool enemy. And so we hear them all.

This way of reading John 6 makes even more sense if we remember that it is probably John's rewrite of the Caesarea Philippi Confession story. Mark wanted to refute a hand-full of inadequate Christologies currently held in that region: Jesus was John resurrected, the view of the ongoing Baptist sect; Jesus was Elijah returned. The Gospel of Thomas, Saying 13, adds other views popular in his milieu: Jesus was

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a philosopher (as many scholars today imagine him), or an angel.[67] The beliefs of the well-wishing but misguided masses are contrasted with that of the inner circle of disciples, whose spokesman Peter is: "You are the Christ." We see the same essentials in John 6: the crowds seem friendly, but they are wrong and cannot handle the truth. Some think Jesus is like one of the old prophets, Moses in particular. Jesus sets aside their belief and asks what the inner circle thinks: "What about you? Will you leave, too?" And again Peter speaks for the rest: "You are the Holy One of God." So again we have a mulligan stew of false views of Jesus, then a contrast between them and the truth. And just as Mark [8:33] called one of the Twelve a devil ("Get behind me, Satan!") in the same story, so does John

say Jesus has recruited one [John 6:70]. And we also find the root of what so preoccupies Kysar with his synchronic reading of John 6: divine initiative giving rise to human faith. For, just as Matthew has Jesus congratulate Peter that he owes his correct Christology not to human opinion (“flesh and blood”) but to divine revelation, John 6 blesses the followers of Jesus as those who are all “taught by God” [John 6:45]. So, obviously, I wish Dr. Kysar hadn’t abandoned historical criticism; the use of it still seems to elucidate puzzling texts in a way synchronic scrutiny does not.

I must report that the main thing I have gotten from this book is a reinforcement of my suspicion that all of modern Johannine scholarship might be aptly summed up (to use again the old cliché) as a series of footnotes to Bultmann[68] and C.H. Dodd.[69] Of the annotators,

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some are original and have much enriched the discussion at some points. These, from my perspective, would include Raymond E. Brown[70] (the orthodox alternative to Bultmann), Robert T. Fortna,[71] and Wayne A. Meeks.[72] Most of the rest of the Johannine guild (reminiscent of the missionary order of the Johannine epistles?) seem to me to have busied themselves with 'dotting i-s and crossing t-s'—or even with 'crossing i-s and dotting t-s!'

And amid all this work, so ably and exhaustively reviewed by Professor Kysar, his guiding star may be summed up in one sentence: "The truth doubtless lies somewhere in between" [pp. 140–141]. I believe I detect here the conventional "let's split the difference" methodology that lets almost everybody be at least partially right. The result is a more-or-less safe critical product. Sure, there is likely to be some truth in Bultmann's Gnostic approach, but once we throw in a fistful of Brown's Dead Sea Scrolls reclaim-John-for-Judaism apologetic, we can bounce half the way back from Bultmann's radicalism as if executing a historical-critical Bungee jump. This one is probably right in reducing John's expectation to realized eschatology, but that one is probably right in restoring *some* kind of future expectation to the recipe. I get the same sort of uneasy feeling I do when I read Crossan: Jesus (or John's gospel) is being made a function of the variety of perspectives used by scholars to study him, as if they were a committee of Olympian gods each making their contribution to creating Pandora. Again, Dr. Kysar's approach is reminiscent of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar counting votes on their reading of a gospel passage and canonizing the result as the official position of the Seminar.

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Throughout the book Dr. Kysar manifests an astonishing mastery of the scholarly debate. He distills it for us, and it is still a vast continent! He has recounted not only the unfolding of his own thinking but also that of the whole guild of Johannine scholars. At first he manages not to confuse

the two histories, but in the end it begins to look as if all previous research has after all led gloriously up to his own Hegelian apex. In his turn to Postmodern interpretation of John (or anything else), Dr. Kysar has fallen in with the wrong crowd. He confesses to have been influenced by that Rasputin of retrenchment, Roman Catholic apologist Luke Timothy Johnson, who calls imaginative scholars to task for daring to "go beyond that which is written" [1 Cor. 4:6]. Like the similarly backward-looking John A.T. Robinson, Johnson and Kysar let us in on the big news that speculation (*gasp!*) is not *fact*. And that therefore, somehow, it is pointless. Kysar seems only now to have discovered that scholarly theories are heuristic devices and thought-experimental paradigms. And that is not good enough for him. What did he think he was doing for all those years? Late in the day he has learned that a purely objective or definitive reconstruction of past events is impossible. But it is clear from his own earlier essays in this book it was not so. He understood, as every single historian does, that all historical 'conclusions' are provisional and tentative, not the stuff of dogma. But now it seems he welcomes permission to throw over the whole enterprise and to stick to a subjective Rorschach-blot reading of the text. How the mighty are fallen!

In his essay, "The Expulsion from the Synagogue: The Tale of a Theory" (a piece that might have fit well in an anthology called *How My Mind Has Lapsed*), Kysar submits the ludicrous conclusion that the so-called Benediction against Heretics, the *aposynagogos* shibboleth, is a fiction, and that we therefore ought to stop interpreting John (and, one supposes, Matthew) as if there had been a late first-century expulsion of Christians from Jewish worship. Kysar wrings his hands for having made such a historical scenario central to his own theorizing for years, having followed the Pied Piper spell, as he now views it, of J. Louis Martyn[73] and Raymond E. Brown. That

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takes some guts, I suppose. But his *mea culpa* is premature. He says, first, that the ancient evidence for a single, ecumenical Jewish ban on Christians is more ambiguous and more fragmentary than had been supposed. But this is like arguing that there was never a canonization of twenty-seven New Testament books because no single Ecumenical Council ever stipulated it. No, it was the work of Athanasius in his 367 Easter

encyclical, plus ratification by three local North African synods. The restriction of usage was gradual after that, but the ultimate result was the same.

Second, Kysar argues, the depiction in John of some Jews who were not alienated from the Jewish authorities and yet followed Jesus (Lazarus, *etc.*) undermines the notion that the gospel is trying to retroject into Jesus' time a later ban on Jesus-friendly Jews. Well, that is just absurd. It is precisely the inconsistency between such passages, which seem to preserve something of the *Sitz-im-Leben Jesu*, and others like John 9:22, where believers in Jesus have already been excommunicated (especially despite the fact that such a measure is still regarded as future in John 16:2), that led scholars to posit that a later crisis had been written back into the time of Jesus for literary-polemical purposes. This is the very "hermeneutic of suspicion" of which Kysar now claims to make so much in fellowship with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and others—as if ideological criticism were not simply a widening of the scope of *Tendenz* criticism.

Third, Kysar seems to feel that to posit an expulsion of Christians by Jews would be politically incorrect, and so it is dangerous to think that it happened. What? Who will not defend, even today, the decision of any group to expel, however regretfully, an element of its membership that is making an intolerable nuisance of itself, insisting that everyone adopt their pet distinctives? It is regrettable, but that doesn't mean such schisms don't or didn't happen.

You can tell where Kysar's own ideological bread is buttered when he condemns George W. Bush for branding Iraq-Iran-North Korea as the Axis of Evil. You mean they weren't? But for Kysar, the 'Other' appears automatically to be innocent. He speaks of how we

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"demonized" the 9/11 hijackers. Seems to me they did a pretty good job of that themselves! In fact, *not* to treat them as demons is to refuse to take seriously their 'Otherness.' No, we tell ourselves over tea, they must be rational chaps like us, somehow driven to their deeds by our own. But I thought we were discussing the Gospel of John. I suppose such way-off-the-mark remarks are the liberal equivalent of William Lane Craig ending his 'academic lectures' with an evangelistic invitation.

John versus Thomas[74]

I think those biblical scholars serve us best who cause us, like an unpredictable old Zen master, to view familiar things in a different way. Gregory J. Riley does the trick pretty well in *Resurrection Reconsidered*. [75] He tries to demonstrate the dialogical relationship of the gospels of John and Thomas, reflecting the disputations of the communities supposed to have produced the two documents. Riley reminds us of the Fourth Gospel's co-optative use of John the Baptist, to make a rival sect's figurehead seem to espouse the Christian view instead. Shouldn't it be just as obvious that John's pointed use of Thomas as a doubter of correct belief, lately converted to the same, is of a piece with the polemical rewriting of the Baptizer? Just as John the Baptist stands for the Baptist sect, Doubting Thomas stands for Thomasine Christianity. And the chief points of Thomasine 'heresy' are targeted in the scenes in which John features Thomas.

Chief among the points over which the two communities differed was the fleshly reality of the resurrection of Jesus. Riley provides an interesting survey of ancient Israelite, Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian beliefs about the fate of the dead. From these data emerge the assessment that the notion of fleshly resurrection emerged late and piecemeal within some strands of Judaism, was unheard of

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everywhere else, and dominant in no form of Judaism or Christianity we know of until formative Catholic Orthodoxy mainstreamed the belief in the second century and later. Riley shows that those polemicists who did accept the doctrine had fellow Christians, not just outsiders, to argue with. Many converts to the Christian faith naturally interpreted their belief according to their inherited assumptions and thus believed Jesus had risen in spiritual form. (1 Corinthians 15:44–45 and 1 Peter 3:18 certainly seem to presuppose the 'spiritual body' version of resurrection.) Riley shows how such traditional belief in soul survival was easily compatible with belief in postmortem apparitions in which the dead might be identified by the death wounds they still visibly bore—even though they lacked physical substance. One recurring theme (not without occasional qualification) was that the dead, however lifelike they might appear, could not be touched or

embraced. When the mourners tried to touch their loved one, they found themselves clasping empty air.

Riley argues plausibly that Thomas Christians believed Jesus was spiritually resurrected (sayings 28–29, 71). This, we are told, John rejected, as he did the Thomasine preference for saving gnosis that made any *illuminatus* the equal/twin of the Living Jesus, and their consequent lack of any demand for saving faith. Whereas Jesus tells the Thomas of the Fifth Gospel he must no longer call him Master, having attained unto the same plateau of spiritual enlightenment (saying 13), in the Fourth Gospel Thomas is patted on the head for worshipping Jesus as "My Lord and my God" [20:28].

All this makes good sense to me. But let me now propose a few 'friendly amendments' to Riley's reconstruction. I wonder if the issue separating the Johannine and Thomasine traditions was really that of the fleshly resurrection of Jesus. My hesitations begin with the resurrection appearance scene in John 20:26–29. Riley reads the passage as affirming the fleshly resurrection of Jesus, over against the supposedly Thomasine notion of a spiritual resurrection. Why does he see it so? Because of the business about Thomas vowing he will not believe unless allowed to probe the open wounds of Jesus for himself. This element of tangibility seems to Riley to push the issue

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beyond what might otherwise look like a postmortem apparition. But is this issue really broached in the passage? I think not. What is it that Thomas swears he will not accept till he can touch the wounds? Thomas is skeptical of the claim of his fellow disciples to "have seen the Lord." No one is said to be debating the Pauline question, "But how are the dead raised? With what sort of body do they come?" We do not read that the other disciples told Thomas, "The Lord is physically raised! It wasn't some ghost, you can count on that!" Neither do we hear that Thomas replied, "Okay, a ghost I could accept! See 'em all the time. No big deal there. But fleshly resurrection? You're going to have to do better than that!" The story doesn't get into that sort of detail. I suspect Riley is reading in, from Luke 24:37, the disciples' initial fear that they were seeing a ghost. But nothing of the kind figures into John 20. The issue there is simply whether it was really Jesus the disciples saw: "We have

seen the Lord!" "I will not believe." He will not believe that they really saw Jesus. What the telltale wounds will convince Thomas of is that the dead Jesus has manifested himself, period. As Riley has pointed out, even ghosts showed their death wounds simply to identify themselves, not to prove their corporeality—which they after all lacked!

So does John really mean to picture the manifested Jesus as appearing in the flesh? As Riley admits, even many in the early church did not read the passage so. After all, John makes a point of saying the doors were closed and locked [20:19–26], surely pointless unless to highlight the ghostly passage of Jesus through them, like Jacob Marley in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. What about the tangibility factor? Note that the point of Thomas' exasperated vow is that he must see for himself. Actual touching proves unnecessary once Jesus appears and simply shows him the identifying marks. Thomas recoils abashed like Job: "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see thee; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" [Job 42:3b, 5–6]. Literal touching must not have been the issue, and it never says he did.

Riley too quickly couples John 20 and Luke 24. Both have reworked a common reappearance tradition, but the point in Luke

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24 seems to me quite different. There Jesus does specifically call attention to his fleshly corporeality. "No spirit has flesh and bones as you see me having." (As Riley points out, Ignatius had independent access to the same tradition: "Take hold of me and see, I am no bodiless demon.") But there is a form-critical point to be remembered here. Such scenes as Luke depicts (and Ignatius alludes to) appear elsewhere in the neighborhood. They are typically reunion scenes between friends or lovers, or master and disciples. In all such cases the point is that the unexpected return of the one feared lost does *not* mark a return from the dead, *i.e.*, the apparition of a ghost, but rather denotes unexpected survival, escape from death. The parallel between Luke 24:39 and Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* is especially close. Apollonius' disciples, having fled the scene of his trial before Domitian, are gathered mourning their master who can scarcely have escaped the tyrant's ire. But, lo and behold, Apollonius himself suddenly appears in their midst! He is no ghost as they first suspect, but

has simply teleported miraculously from Rome, just as Philip does from Gaza to Ashdod in Acts 8:39–40. He invites them to handle him and prove to themselves it is really he, and no ghost. In other words, they should thus satisfy themselves that he is not *back* from the dead but has instead *cheated* death. Luke 24 and Ignatius seem to rely upon a version of the Passion in which the suffering righteous one, Jesus, was delivered out of the hand of his enemies by premature removal from the cross, another standard feature of Hellenistic romances, whose heroes rather frequently get themselves sentenced to the cross or actually crucified, and then escape. Note how often the Lukan redactional material in chapter 24 has Jesus "suffering" or being "delivered into the hands of men," instead of actually and explicitly *dying*. Jane Schaberg[76] raises the possibility that the virginal conception of Jesus is not a New Testament doctrine/myth at all, but has been read into the texts of Matthew and Luke through the conventions of second-century patristic theology. In the same way, I wonder if it is really John and Luke, as Riley thinks, who argued for a fleshly resurrection of Jesus, or rather perhaps Riley is

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still too willing to take the second-century Christians' word for what Luke and John meant.

At any rate, it seems clear that John has reworked the Luke/Ignatius tradition. The original form of the story stressed tangibility so as to prove Jesus had not actually died. John clearly supposes Jesus *had* died. The Johannine Jesus does not stress fleshly corporeality but rather identifying marks. Luke's closed doors provided the occasion for the flabbergasted disciples to erroneously suspect him a ghost. John's closed doors denote that the postmortem Jesus *is* a ghost, back from a genuine death. The point is quite different.

Riley does an admirable bit of detective work matching up clues from the Gospel of John on the one hand with those from the Thomas canon (*Gospel of Thomas, Book of Thomas the Contender, Acts of Thomas*) to indicate points where the two theologies collided, but I wonder if perhaps we cannot find a few more and, in the process, hypothetically reconstruct some theological evolution within Thomas Christianity. I suggest John is trying to correct Thomas Christians at two stages. First, let us suppose that the Thomas Christians believed in a 'Living Jesus' who

had neither died on the cross (despite being crucified) nor ascended to heaven shortly thereafter. We are acquainted with similar beliefs among Gnostic Christians who believed Jesus remained among his disciples for 18 months to 11 years after his resurrection. Similarly, Matthew's Great Commission says nothing of any ascension but rather pictures Jesus accompanying his disciples on their missionary journeys (of course, harmonizing, we never read it that way). The Ahmadiyya sect and various others (including, recently, Barbara Thiering) have pictured Jesus surviving or escaping the cross and leaving the Holy Land to continue his teaching elsewhere. Apart from whether such a thing happened, we may ask whether there is any textual evidence that any New Testament era Christians *thought* it happened. And there *is* some. As it happens, John, who habitually places current misunderstandings on the lips of Jesus' opponents, has someone 'misunderstand' Jesus as predicting, not that he will ascend to heaven, but that he will "go to the Diaspora among the Greeks and

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teach the Greeks" [7:35]. I submit that this means John knew that some believed this is just what Jesus did. I'm hazarding the guess that the Thomas Christians believed this. The anti-Thomas polemic Riley sees John engaged in would include this attempted refutation. And against the idea of a surviving itinerant Jesus John lays his stress on the genuine death of Jesus, something not made sufficiently clear in previous gospels.

Let us take a look at the same three Johannine references to Thomas that Riley examines. He sees much. Taking his hint, we may be able to see more. First there is the Lazarus story in chapter 11. Riley notes that here Thomas is made implicitly to doubt the resurrection of Lazarus, just as in chapter 20 he will be made explicitly to doubt the resurrection of Jesus. How is that? Because, as Riley strikingly points out, Thomas' fatalistic sigh, "Let us go, too, so we may die with him," refers to dying not with Jesus (since Jesus has just assured Thomas that he is not yet in any danger), but to *Lazarus*. Jesus has announced his intention to raise Lazarus up [11:11], but all Thomas expects is Lazarus' death (and their own, in an ambush). On the one hand, we may ask Riley why it is that Thomas should take Jesus' word that Jesus is in no danger and yet expect that he and his fellow disciples will die in Bethany. On the other, we may ask if Riley's

argument proves too much. If it is the fleshly nature of the future resurrection of believers (of whom Lazarus is an advance specimen) that is at stake here, does John mean that the dead will be merely resuscitated like Lazarus, whom we must imagine to have died again some time later, perhaps at the hands of the Sanhedrin [12:10]?

I suspect that the point of chapter 11 is to furnish a dress rehearsal for the death and resurrection of Jesus himself, and that the goal is to demonstrate the reality of the death of Lazarus explicitly and of Jesus implicitly. This is why John tells the tale of Lazarus rather than those of the daughter of Jairus or the son of the widow of Nain. Those did not pass muster precisely because it was not completely clear that the patient was really dead. Of Jairus' daughter Jesus actually says "The child is not dead but sleeping"

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[Mark 5:39], and in a number of contemporary stories (featuring Asclepiades the physician, Apollonius of Tyana, and several others) the point is that someone not yet dead is rescued at the last possible moment from premature burial by people who lacked the keen diagnostic eye of the master physician. Form-critically, then, we ought to expect that any such story in which someone very recently dead is said merely to sleep is not a resurrection miracle but rather a rescue from premature burial. So the Jairus and Nain stories would very likely have been read by the ancients as *Scheintod*, apparent death, stories. And this was not good enough for John, who did not like the fact that some, including Thomas Christians, understood the crucifixion of Jesus the same way, as only an apparent death. So he supplies the Lazarus story as a prelude to the Passion of Jesus and as a guide for interpreting it. His point is to rule out the possibility that the death was only apparent. He seems first to set up the possibility ("'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep'"—11:11), only to knock it down ("Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead'"—11:13). This is obviously why John has Jesus stay put so that when he finally does arrive, Lazarus has been moldering in the tomb long enough that he must by now be a rotting corpse [11:39]. The point is not just that Jesus has rescued Lazarus from the tomb (which would still be the case even if Lazarus had been

prematurely buried as in the other stories), but that Lazarus died and came back. (Even after all this, it must be pointed out, John has not completely succeeded, since we only hear that Martha *expected* there to be a stench. She *assumed* her brother was decomposing, but if he lay in a cataleptic state, he wouldn't have.) Are we to infer, then, that John also envisioned a grossly physical resuscitation of Jesus, since Lazarus returns physically? Apparently not, since, again, no one in the early church wanted Jesus raised in that way, a resurrection unto mere mortality. So John probably doesn't want Lazarus' resurrection to anticipate Jesus' in every respect. But he must have the reality of the death itself in mind, since he goes out of his way to make that point.

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In the Farewell Discourse of John 14:5, John assigns Thomas these lines: "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Of course Jesus replies that he himself is the way, but this scarcely contains all of John's answer to the question, an answer he certainly feels (as Riley says) the Thomas Christians "do not know." And that, I suggest, is the way of the cross. "... if it dies, it bears much fruit... If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him... I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" [12:24, 26, 32]. It is perhaps Thomas Christians who are in view at 19:34–35, where the narrator swears up and down that he saw Jesus fatally wounded and wants you to believe. Believe what? Simply that, as in *The Wizard of Oz*, Jesus was "morally, ethically, spiritually, physically, positively, absolutely, undeniably, and reliably dead."

And, as we have seen, finally, when the Risen Jesus appears to Thomas, the point of showing the wounds (which conspicuously do *not* get touched) is probably to show at once *that* Jesus did die but is now back, not in the first instance, *how* he is back.

Perhaps the Thomas Christians pictured Jesus, like Elijah or al-Khadr ("the evergreen one"), as "with you always, even unto the consummation of the age" [Matt. 28:20]. No ascension rounded off their myth of Jesus such as wrapped up Luke's. John's emphasis on Jesus' ascension as an item likely to offend [John 6:61–62] might have been aimed at the Thomas Christians.

My guess is that the Thomas Christians first believed that Jesus had survived the cross and set out to the East to resume his preaching, going as far as Syria or, as some would later say, Kashmir and India. Against this belief John aims (or preserves) the polemic that Jesus was "not only really dead, but most sincerely dead." The Thomas Christians then accepted this belief from the majority of Christians. But then what of their belief in the missionary travels of the post-cross Jesus? At this point they would have believed in the (saving?) death of Jesus, but not in a physical resurrection, the kind that would have allowed for physical travels to India. So the bearer of their faith to the far reaches of Syria, Edessa, and India must not

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have been Jesus (martyred and seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father) but rather someone who might have been mistaken for Jesus, say, a twin brother of Jesus who carried on in his name. This stage of the Thomas tradition remains visible in the *Acts of Thomas* in the several places where Jesus is said to appear in the form of his brother Thomas as well as those in which Thomas is said explicitly to resemble his brother Jesus.

This was not good enough for the Johannine community, who sought to correct the belief by means of the Doubting Thomas pericope. As an exegete of an earlier day (alas, I cannot recall whom) suggested, the reason the Risen Jesus must appear to Thomas in particular is to counteract the belief of some that the resurrection was a case of mistaken identity, that people saw Jesus' twin brother Thomas and took him for Jesus himself returned from the dead. By showing the Risen Jesus and Didymus Thomas side by side, as in a Superman comic book wherein the Man of Steel contrives to be seen side by side with Clark Kent (probably a robot double), John means to show that the two cannot be the same. The subsequent orthodox overlay on the Acts of Thomas (which Riley discusses) implies that eventually the Thomas Christians were drawn into the Johannine orbit, and the theological gaps closed. Part of this redaction was the scene in which the reader again is shown Jesus side by side with Thomas, as the former orders the latter to missionize India, making it clear that even though it was Thomas who had missionized India, he was not replacing a dead Jesus but acting on behalf of a risen one.

Thomas the renegade has left his mark in the New Testament. Riley notes that in John only Thomas [John 20:24] and Judas Iscariot [John

6:71] are specifically called “one of the Twelve,” and, needless to say, both are shown in a dubious light. I suggest this is because they were originally one and the same character. From the ‘orthodox’ side, the ‘heresy’ of Judas Thomas (as Syriac sources called him) became Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Jesus, while the subsequent co-opting of Thomas into orthodoxy produced the depiction of a doubting but finally repentant Thomas. It was exactly like the narrative splitting of the once heresy-tainted Paul (as Tertullian dubbed him, “the apostle of Marcion and the apostle of the heretics”) into the heretical Simon
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Magus on the one hand and Paul the obedient lackey of the Jerusalem apostles on the other.

Red Hot Chili Pepys[77]

Yuri Kuchinsky’s fascinating volume *The Magdalene Gospel: A Look Behind the New Testament[78]* has grown out of the author’s researches and subsequent Internet debates concerning the Middle English Pepysian Gospel Harmony (MS Pepys 2498) which has slumbered away the centuries in the library of Magdalene College, Oxford. Kuchinsky is convinced that this curious and mostly neglected text represents the hypothetical gospel harmony of Justin Martyr with much Johannine material added. Justin’s harmony, our author reckons, would have been based on earlier versions of Mark and Luke plus canonical Matthew, while the Johannine source would have been a similarly intermediate version of our Fourth Gospel. Kuchinsky notes the tendency of the Pepys text to side with Old Latin and Syriac readings, which he considers often superior (as do I, just to keep things straight). He does not underestimate the length of time separating the Pepys manuscript from what he considers its vastly earlier date of composition, but he is able to connect many dots to form a hypothetical line of transmission and dissemination. It must have come from *somewhere*, after all.

The Magdalene Gospel treats a number of interesting subjects in new ways. His championing of the neglected work of the great Alfred Loisy is refreshing. Not least important is Kuchinsky’s case that we have erred in dating the gospels so early and in failing to detect much later materials in the Pauline epistles, errors that have blinded us to a

fascinating possibility, namely, that the de-Judaizing of Christianity so vehemently debated in the New Testament is really a second-century phenomenon following upon the defeat of Bar-Kochba and Hadrian's outlawing of Jewish practice. This point by itself deserves much thought.

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I mean to treat here the central argument of the book, namely a reiteration of Boismard's judgment that the Pepys Gospel Harmony represents a second-century text or form of the text. The best way to do this will be to survey instances where the Pepys text differs from the familiar readings of our gospels. After reading through them, I confess that, contra Kuchinsky's arguments, I found no instance in which the differences did not make ample sense to me as pious glosses and redactions, together with summarizing omissions from the conventional gospels used as source materials.

Kuchinsky points to the remarkable fact of the entire absence from the text of the phrase 'Son of Man.' Instead, Jesus simply speaks of himself in the first person. This Kuchinsky takes to denote a very early date, suggesting that the phrase has been added to all four gospels only in the last stages of editing, perhaps in order to obscure the text, a seemingly odd scribal strategy. Partisans of an early date for Thomas make a similar case, contending that Thomas is pre-Christological, but I don't agree with them either: Thomas seems to me to want to do away with Christological titles as barriers to the experience of the Living Jesus himself ("Tell us who you are, so we may believe in you," Saying 91). In the same way, I read Thomas not as pre-apocalyptic but as eliminating futuristic eschatology as a Gnosticizing response to the delay of the Parousia. The Pepys harmony also everywhere replaces 'kingdom' of God with 'bliss' of God, which must be a similar result of de-eschatologizing and a sign of lateness.

The Magi from the East become the Three Kings familiar from Christmas carols in Pepys 3:15; unlike the nativity star, this is not a particularly auspicious sign. Herod dispatches "*all* his men" to exterminate the Bethlehem innocents, another bit of legendary embellishment. In 7:1 we read that "When St. John had himself baptised he went into the desert till he was thirty years old." (Kuchinsky regards "St." in all such references as secondary scribal piety, not original to the

text. Could be.) Is this some ancient tradition about John's self-immersion? It might be, but it might just be medieval speculation: surely John would have felt the need to be

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baptized, and who else would have been available to do the job? And his age is just an inference from the Lukan notes that Jesus and John were born in the same year and that Jesus was about 30 when John dipped him.

In Pepys 7:7, John preaches "they should not put their trust in being the descendants of those who were once so pleasing to God. Because God also may make good people out of those who no one had any hope in before." This is not more primitive than Luke 3:8b but rather a gloss upon it. In 7:23, Jesus sets John's mind at ease about his own baptism: it is for the sake of "giving all others an example in every way, and especially of humility," a gloss on the vague Matthew 3:15. The text does seem to be in touch with the old tradition (*Gospel of the Ebionites* cited in Epiphanius *Against Heresies* 30:13:7–8; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 88:3) of fire dancing on the surface of the Jordan at the baptism: "there came the brightness of heaven with the Holy Spirit, and alighted in him" [7:25]. But then again, none of this is exactly pre-canonical, is it?

Kuchinsky takes it as a mark of an earlier form of the text when Jesus is depicted as less brusque or abusive, as in Pepys 10:4, where Jesus does not rebuke his busybody mother, omitting John 2:4's "Woman, leave me alone, can't you?" But surely it is more natural to take all such examples as instances of "damage control" (as Crossan calls it), removing Jesus' impudent reply to the Blessed Virgin. In the same story, Jesus turns water into wine to the tune of a mere three gallons, not thirty, per jar. Earlier? No, just another attempt to rein in Jesus according to the sensibilities of later piety. Likewise in Pepys 40:16, Jesus does not contradict his well-wisher as in Luke 11:28 ("Nay, rather...") but just elaborates: "Certainly, but blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." This is a later, cosmetic improvement of the more difficult, hence more primitive, Lukan reading. Yet again, Pepys shows itself to be anything but primitive in its version of the visit of Jesus' family. Matthew and Luke had already omitted Mark's note [3:21] that Jesus' kinfolk thought him paranoid. Matthew retained Jesus' third-person rebuke [12:48], while Luke softened even that [8:21]. Here is the Pepysian

version: “And Jesus replied to those who told him [that his family awaited] that all those

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who hear his words and do accordingly—he loved them as much as his mother or his relatives.” And instead of ‘brothers,’ it is his ‘cousins’ who visit! Here we have nothing but the Catholic veneration of the Holy Family.

Pepys 11:15 specifies not just that one must be “born of water” [John 3:5], but actually “baptised in water” to enter the “heavenly glory.” Another gloss, no doubt correct, but no less a gloss for all that.

The Samaritan woman asks Jesus, in this version, “whether it is better to worship here, upon the Mount Gerizim, as our ancestors did, or in Jerusalem?” [Pepys 13:18]. Kuchinsky deems this an earlier reading, since it actually names John’s “this mountain” [John 4:20]. But why not take it as another gloss for the medieval reader’s benefit? And when the Pepysian Jesus answers “that the hour was come when the people need not regard either this or the other, but honor God and the Holy Spirit in all places” [13:19], we have not, I think, a more primitive and authentically Johannine piece of realized eschatology, but rather an assimilation to the reader’s own historical situation, already implicit in John 4:21, but made pedantically explicit here. Kuchinsky thinks it important that the woman does not assume Jesus sides with Judaism instead of Samaritanism, perhaps implying an earlier, Samaritan or Samaritan-tilting, version. But I would think the (summarizing) Pepys version has simply left out the “you Jews” business because of its much later Christian standpoint which easily forgets Jesus’ Jewishness. Plus, note the anti-Modalistic distinguishing between God and the Holy Ghost, correcting John’s uneasy-making “God is Spirit” [John 4:24; *cf*. 1 Cor.15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17—ouch!].

We learn in 20:13 that “Matthew Levi” was some sort of cooper or metal-worker, but this is likely a pious attempt to exonerate him from being a tax-collector even before Jesus recruited him. In any case, “Matthew Levi” represents a Mark-Matthew harmonization and thus is scarcely early.

Pepys 46, the rejection in Nazareth, has a very interesting reading. The list of Jesus’ relatives reads exactly as I have proposed the pre-Markan list must have:[79] “Is this not the son of Joseph, the carpenter?

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Is not Mary his mother? Are not James and John and Simon and Judas his brothers?" By the time we read it in Mark 6:3, "Joseph" has dropped out of the first sentence in favor of "Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary," in the interest of the emerging miracle-birth doctrine. 'Joseph' has fallen down into the second sentence as 'Joses,' replacing 'John,' who, as one of the Pillars, as per Eisenman, must have been a brother of Jesus[80] along with James the Just and Simeon bar-Cleophas/Simon Cephas. This connection is preserved in the designation of John bar-Zebedee and John the Baptist as Jesus' 'cousins.' So if Kuchinsky is right, the Pepys reading would come in quite handy for me. But who knows? Since tradition early on made John bar-Zebedee the cousin of Jesus, and Pepys apparently regards Jesus' brothers as his cousins, this passage may have introduced him among the male kin of Jesus, rather than reflecting pre-Markan tradition.

Kuchinsky suggests that the beatitude found in 24:9, "Blessed are they who desire righteousness in their food and drink," represents Jewish Christianity, an endorsement of kosher laws. It sounds to me more like a rewording of the Matthean "those who hunger and thirst after righteousness/justice," though the motive may indeed be to foster Christian *kashruth*. It is at any rate subsequent to the Luke/Q version which had merely "who hunger." The Pepys harmony goes on to provide the skimpiest, indirect discourse summary of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthean version). Kuchinsky freely admits that the text habitually summarizes, paraphrasing and condensing. But he seems not to notice how this feature of the text makes it more likely that, in every case where something familiar from the traditional gospel texts is missing, it has been omitted, perhaps clumsily. For instance, when the Pepys text [30:6] lacks the qualifier to the encomium on the Baptist ("... nonetheless, the least in the kingdom of heaven ranks higher than he."), this does not mean we are reading the pristine form of the saying. I am willing to bet the qualifier is indeed an apologetical interpolation prior

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to Q, and that is why it reads like a contrived afterthought. But I think the Pepysian redactor disliked its clumsiness and trimmed it away.

How interesting that in the Pepysian version, Jesus raises up not the son but the daughter of the widow of Nain! But does this mean we are reading a more primitive version? I doubt it: this version merely carries the Lukan story farther from its source, Elijah's resurrection of the Zarephath widow's son [1 Kings 17:17–24], assimilating it to the resurrection of Jairus' *daughter*.

Pepys 30:5 shares with the *Liege Diatessaron* and Ephraem Syrus the reading that John the Baptist's audience had not gone out merely to see "a reed that stirs and bends with every wind." But this is surely a clever gloss on the seemingly pointless "reed shaken by the wind," which probably meant "you didn't just go for the scenery, did you?" That it cannot be original is evident from the fact that it imports praise for John (he sticks by his principles) into the very member of the comparison that is being rejected!

John is called "the angel that God promised who should come and make way before Christ" (also 30:5), but this need not be taken, as Kuchinsky does, as a vestige of an early, less Christocentric Jewish Christianity (though I, too, envision such a stage in which Jesus and John were venerated equally). All it means is that somewhere along the line someone mixed up the two meanings of *aggelon*: John the messenger becomes John the angel. Midrash or mistake?

The "children in the marketplace" simile, simpler than the canonical version, seems to me to be simplified, not more primitive as Kuchinsky would have it. Even recent commentators differ over precisely who is complaining to whom and about whom or what, so it is no wonder that the Pepys harmonist took the easy way out: "they were like children who neither laughed nor wept with their friends" [30:9].

Pepys identifies the Lukan sinner who anoints Jesus in the Pharisee's house [7:36–50] with Mary Magdalene [Pepys 31:3], a notorious post-canonical harmonization. More intriguing is the change in the parable of the two debtors. Jesus now asks which of the pair of

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forgiven deadbeats the *creditor* loves more! Interesting, to be sure, but probably the change is a piece of redaction justifying Jesus' apparent disdain for the priggish Simon in favor of the repentant woman. For all the

difficulty commentators have had trying to make the parable fit Luke's secondary context, the element of the greater debtor loving the lenient creditor more is one of the few things that *did* fit! But not in Pepys. The forgiven woman goes on to join Jesus' female entourage [31:22]—just as she does in the late apocryphon *The Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew*. (Mary of Bethany is amalgamated with Mary Magdalene, too, in 35:1, another late, legendary identification. Later on in the story the Beloved Disciple is likewise equated with John bar-Zebedee, presupposing a later piece of guesswork.)

The Rich Fool story [42:6–14] has taken on the color of Christian eschatology ("Fool, this very night the demons will deliver your soul to hell."), losing the original Jewish wisdom tenor, where the irony is more subtle: the fool has built up a future he will just miss enjoying. In light of this, Kuchinsky's contention that the story as we read it here is more primitive because it has the fool destroy a single barn rather than several, seems gratuitous.

Startlingly, Pepys gospel 43 merges the report of the Galileans whom Pilate massacred with Josephus' account of Pilate's butchery of the peaceful minions of the Samaritan Taheb, which got him sacked. Only Pepys has Jesus himself lead the crowd to Gerizim! Plainly someone has confused *Jesus* with *Christ*, *i.e.*, messiah generically, and grossly confused the story.

Kuchinsky reads Pepys 48:7–9 as depicting the fusion of John's orphaned disciples with Jesus'. But this is all it says: "And then St. John's disciples came and buried his body, and afterward came to Jesus and told him how St. John was martyred. And the apostles, themselves, came, and told Jesus all that they had done and taught. And then Jesus told them all that they should follow him privately into the wilderness, and that they rest themselves for a little while—because they had labored greatly." All we have here is a compressed version of Matthew 14:12–15. There is nothing here to suggest John's disciples joined Jesus' company.

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The healing of the paralytic at the Pool of Bethsaida [47] contains the marginal gloss about the angel troubling the waters, strictly a piece of late Johannine textual tradition. Similarly, the Pepys harmony contains a glossed version of the Woman Taken in Adultery [59:26–40], and in its

Johannine context, which means the harmonist used a very late version of John.

Kuchinsky thinks it a mark of older vintage that in the Pepysian version of the exorcism of the Syro-Phoenician's daughter [52] Jesus is made to answer the disciples, not the woman, that he was sent only to Israel. In this version, *they* had been urging him to heal the daughter, just to shut the mother up. But, really, how is the point any different from the Matthean/Markan version where he speaks to the mother in order to placate the disciples who ask him to send her away?

The Pepys version of the Dishonest Steward (68:1–4) says the manager was being sacked for embezzlement, but that his conduct thereafter was strictly above reproach: "And the steward acquired for himself many friends, and settled his lord's debts fair and square." More primitive than Luke's version? No, rather a sanitized version composed so as to avoid having Jesus seem to commend wicked behavior, another long-standing headache for commentators. Likewise, when Pepys gospel [96:48] has John (the Beloved Disciple) known only to the high priest's servants, not to the priest himself as in John's gospel, we have no earlier, less problematical version but rather a later smoothing of a puzzling oddity.

Who carried Jesus' cross? Not Simon of Cyrene, but Simon the Leper, from Matthew 26:6! This change might have been made to undercut Simonian legends equating Simon of Gitta/of the Kittim/of Cyrene with the Crucified. Or it might have seemed that a leper made a more natural scapegoat.[81] In any case, what we have here is more apocryphal character-hybridizing.

In the Pepys gospel, the Risen Jesus appears to Peter, supplying what is so conspicuously missing from the canonical gospels,

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especially Luke: "And when St. Peter heard it that they had seen Jesus, he rose and went down to the sepulchre. And right away, Jesus showed himself to St. Peter" [107:1–2]. But that's just it: this harmony supplies what *the original* lacked; hence this version is a gloss. It is much harder to account for why Luke, who does believe Jesus appeared to Peter [24:34], does not portray it than to suppose Luke originally had it, as preserved in

Pepys, and that some scribe cut it out! It is designed to plug a hole in the text.

In sum, the Pepys harmony just does not appear to be a combination of pre-canonical versions of the gospels. Just about every divergence can be understood more easily as pious glossing from a much later standpoint. Kuchinsky's reading is not required by, nor really even easily compatible with, the text he himself has provided. I do not belong to that magisterium of mainstream scholars on whom the author expends his venom so often throughout the book. Nor is my own working paradigm of gospel origins threatened by his reconstruction. Indeed, it would come in quite handy for me at various points. Other readers may come to different conclusions. Nor is my conclusion that one ought not to spend the time with this book. Quite the opposite: there is much to be learned here on various topics, and the work repays study.

Outside the Gospels[82]

Robert E. van Voorst's *Jesus outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence[83]* is the latest to deal with this irresistibly fascinating topic, following predecessors including Bernhard Pick's *The Life of Jesus from Extra-Canonical Sources* (1887)[84] and *Jesus in the Talmud* (1913),[85] Joachim Jeremias's

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Unknown Sayings of Jesus (1957 and 1964),[86] Roderic Dunkerley's *Beyond the Gospels* (1957),[87] and F.F. Bruce's *Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament* (1974).[88] The very premise and title of the book would seem to promise the reader a voyage of discovery, a penetration of canonical veils to glimpse some hitherto-forbidden mystery. It is hardly the author's fault that the curiosities on display turn out mostly to be disappointing, but one cannot escape the feeling that Van Voorst's book is nonetheless an effort at bomb-defusing. This book represents the genre of 'domesticating the evidence,' the harmonization of errant data with orthodoxy, offering the anxious seminary student the welcome but possibly fraudulent assurance that 'everything's copasetic.' Can *all* these tantalizing agrapha and extracanonical gospels, *all* these radically dissenting theorists Van Voorst mentions but emasculates, really be that easily brushed off? Every *one* of them a dud? Van Voorst represents what

one might call the stuck-in-the-middle-with-you school of biblical scholarship, where the criterion for truth in theories is the comfort level within the plausibility structure of middle-of-the-road 'guild scholarship.' The sort of thing one finds in *Bible Review* and *The Journal of Biblical Literature.* The fact would be evident enough from certain *Sitz-im-Leben* clues like the inclusion of Gary Habermas's *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus* in the bibliography, a citation of N.T. Wright, and the cover blurbs by Ben Witherington and John P. Meier. With friends like these…

Van Voorst dismisses dissident, heretical, or eccentric theories with, at best, mushy and equivocal arguments. This is a style of argumentation we have come to expect from those who welcome any argument that defends the *status quo*, whether inherently strong or weak. The controlling assumption in such discussions is simple brand loyalty: if the traditional position still *might* be true, we are

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entitled to stick with it. Van Voorst sometimes renders the verdict 'not proven,' implying a bias toward familiar theories and a belief that they deserve the benefit of the doubt simply for the sake of their familiarity, as if one were being asked to switch phone companies and had not yet been shown a good enough reason for going through the hassle.

But most of the time Van Voorst just invokes the inertia of consensus, assuming that the mass is correct. Of course they might be. Kooks, luckily, are usually in the minority. But, then again, so are pioneer theorists, advocates of new and ultimately victorious paradigms over against the dead weight of what Thomas Kuhn called "normative science." Here is a sampling of Van Voorst's constant defaults to the consensus fallacy. The "vast majority of researchers" working on the gospels "discern 'the historical Jesus' with some confidence and fullness" [p. 7]. Bruno Bauer's naughty arguments for the mythical character of Jesus were "effectively refuted in the minds of most. They gained no lasting following or influence on subsequent scholarship, especially in the mainstream" [p. 9]. Bauer inspired the Dutch Radical School (which Van Voorst keeps referring to as the Radical Dutch School), most of the members of which rejected both the authenticity of the Pauline epistles and the historical character of Jesus, but, *contra* Van Voorst [p. 10], W.C. van Manen did not reject the historical Jesus. At any rate, their theories

are negligible since “Their arguments were stoutly attacked in the Netherlands... [and] largely ignored outside it” [p. 10]. Contemporary Christ-Myth theorist George A. Wells, whose views Van Voorst carelessly misrepresents and libelously caricatures [pp. 13–17; *cf*., his likewise erroneous ascription of the Swoon Theory to Hugh J. Schonfield, p. 79], “has not been persuasive” [p. 14]. The Dead Sea Scrolls? “A clear consensus has developed among scholars that these documents comprised the library of the Essene sectarian community that existed near Qumran” [p. 75]. The sin of Robert Eisenman, Barbara Thiering, and John M. Allegro is, first and foremost, to have dared to propose their own maverick theories. Van Voorst is pleased to quote John Painter in condemnation of Eisenman: “Not only are his conclusions at variance with mainstream scholarship, but his methods of handling

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evidence and developing arguments are also different.” Then they must be wrong, no? Van Voorst adds to this skirt-clutching denunciation Painter’s scandalized notice that Eisenman’s book “features scarcely a reference to any contemporary scholar” [p. 78]. But perhaps that is what makes Eisenman’s work so refreshing and allows it to be so revolutionary. “Thiering’s views have been largely ignored by other scholars” [p. 80], a damning sin in Van Voorst’s eyes. “Almost all scholarly studies of the relationship of Qumran and the New Testament have reached a more moderate position” [p. 81]: so declares the epistemology of the nose-count. When it comes to the Slavonic version of Josephus’ *Jewish War,* with its fulsome but heretical accounts of John the Baptist and Jesus, Van Voorst assures us (or, more to the point, *re*-assures us): “Scholars have almost unanimously rejected the authenticity of the Slavonic *Testimonium*” [p. 88]. As to the more familiar Greek version of the Jesus passage in *Jewish Antiquities,* “most now prefer one of two middle positions” [p. 93]. Well, what would you expect? It’s safer there.

Like all apologists for orthodoxy, Van Voorst will not brook the so-called argument from silence. As Wells has had to point out innumerable times, it *is* quite significant when a writer fails to mention something that, if known, must have been germane to his point. It just *has* to be accounted for when the Pauline epistles make no reference whatever to Jesus’ miracles or to his teachings on celibacy, non-retaliation, payment of taxes,

and other issues where Paul might have instantly settled a question by a mere citation of dominical logia. And Wells's view that no such material had yet been coined in Paul's day is a very sensible one, however offensive to the orthodox. Similarly, Van Voorst and N.T. Wright are just axe-grinding when they think it unimportant that Q had no Passion narrative, and they seem to feel entitled to assume that the Q community shared with all other early Christians a belief in the cross. How can it escape them that the historian can have no right to assert what there is no evidence for? As Jacob Neusner says, "what we cannot show, we do not know."[89] Van Voorst, Wright, *et al*., simply want a license to

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harmonize disparate evidence, to pretend that it all says the same thing, and this because of their unstated assumptions of the unity of canonical scripture and of a united, orthodox, catholic and apostolic 'early Church.'

The same "grinding," as Richard L. Tierney calls it, "of the axe of the apostles" accounts for the all-too-convenient canonical bias in Van Voorst. Everywhere he discounts anything found in any ancient source unless it is comfortably redundant with what is in the canon. And the heretical must be jettisoned as unhistorical: "Obviously, sayings [in the Gospel of Thomas] that reflect an explicit gnosticizing tendency must be discounted" [p. 203]. Now why would that be? Because 'we know' that Gnostics can have had no grounds for their claim that their doctrines stemmed from esoteric teachings of Jesus? Both early Gnostic and Catholic teachers made claims of apostolic succession. What but confessional bias makes Van Voorst dismiss one set of claims out of hand?

Similarly, it is hilarious to watch him shoot skeet with virtually all the sayings of the 'agrapha' tradition, the sayings of Jesus quoted by various early Christian authors but not collected in any gospel. As we watch him plug one after another, we cannot but think of the skepticism of the Jesus Seminar (at whom Van Voorst predictably sneers, p. 2) in its scrutiny of the canonical gospel tradition. Van Voorst is just as ruthless as the Jesus Seminar—once he gets safely outside the canon!

I am not personally acquainted with Professor Van Voorst, so I do not know whether he would accept the appellation of a conservative apologist. But that is beside the point: the result is the same, because leaden 'mainstream' scholarship nowadays largely coincides with

conservative apologetics, and that is not because the arguments have gotten any better. It represents a demographic shift in the plausibility structure.

One may, indeed one *must*, take issue with Van Voorst's (usually seemingly secondhand) judgments on particular questions of ancient documents and their authenticity. It is interesting to observe instances of special pleading, such as his determination to see Suetonius' reference

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to one *Chrestus*, an inciter of riots among Jews in Rome, as a mention of *Jesus Christ*. This just seems preposterous, unless one wants to follow Barbara Thiering (something Van Voorst generally does not want to do) in suggesting Jesus survived Golgotha and eventually arrived in Rome. What can it even mean to *say* that Suetonius mentions the Christian Jesus, when he cannot get the name right, places him on the wrong continent, fifteen years too late, and in an impossibly alien context? But the real irony (and implicit double standard) is how close Van Voorst comes to the methodology of G.A. Wells. "Suetonius's statement indicates how vague and incorrect knowledge of the origins of Christianity could be, both in the first and early second century. Similar sounds and spelling led him, like others, to misread *Christus* as *Chrestus*. Continued public unrest over this Christ [as preached by missionaries] had led Claudius to... send the troublemakers packing. From this initial misunderstanding came the idea that this Chrestus was actually present in Rome as an instigator in the 40s" [p. 39]. In other words, someone filled a historical gap with speculation on what sort of historical individual, and in what circumstances, *must* have corresponded to a mere name that had become religiously controversial. That is 100 per cent the process of speculative reconstruction that Wells said led second-century Christians to devise (in ignorance but in all good conscience) a historical Jesus Christ who *must* have, *would* have, lived in the time of Pontius Pilate.

Interestingly, Van Voorst [p. 34] nudges awake bits of data that might turn around and bite him. He notes how many Gentiles, including Christians, would have seen no difference between *Christus* and *Chrestus*. Doesn't this imply that for many Christians Jesus was not the *Messiah* but rather the *Good*? Could the Messiah business have been secondary, a result of syncretistic Judaizing? Similarly, he says that most Gentiles would have

taken *Christos* to imply ‘healer’ (anointer with oil) or even ‘plasterer,’ *i.e*., *carpenter*. Can one be forgiven for asking how we know one of these options was not the original denotation of ‘the Christ’? Even in the gospels, Jesus is famously both healer and carpenter.

Thallos, a mid-first century historian, is said by Julius Africanus to have attributed the supernatural darkness at the crucifixion to a mere eclipse, a theory which Africanus rejects. This sounds like

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an early mention of the legend included in the gospels. As such it would be quite significant. But Africanus does not actually quote any passage in which Thallos mentions Jesus or the crucifixion. Van Voorst minimizes the problem here, but we cannot rule out the likelihood that Africanus simply found some reference in Thallos to an eclipse at what Africanus thought was the time of Jesus’ death and simply assumed Thallos was making reference to the Jesus story. But it gets worse when, as Van Voorst admits, Eusebius tells us that Thallos recorded no event after the 167th Olympiad, or 112–109 BCE. Africanus, then, must have been mistaken.

Finally, as to Van Voorst’s discussion of the intriguing anti-gospel, the *Toledoth Jeschu*, one can only complain not that it is derivative (which it is), but that it is not derivative *enough*. For all the scholars and books he mentions, he omits Hugh J. Schonfield’s fascinating *According* to *the Hebrews*, which provides a highly plausible and radically different estimation of the source, its original meaning and resultant value.

Van Voorst tells us that the extracanonical documents he quotes add nothing to our canonical picture of Jesus (and so, implicitly, are worthless), while both classical and Jewish references to Jesus serve to confirm what we know from the canonical gospels — even though he admits they are altogether dependent upon Christian traditions and preaching! We are reminded of the old dictum that all books outside the Koran are superfluous: those which agree with the Koran are redundant, while those that say anything else are heretical.

I Do not Know the Man!

Frank R. Zindler, in *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew*[90] provides a fascinating survey of ostensible Jewish sources of tradition regarding

Jesus of Nazareth and reminds us of the pivotal role once played by Deist, Atheist, and Freethought skeptics in starting the engine of the Higher Criticism. One would almost be disappointed not to find frequent religion-bashing cracks and epithets in Zindler's

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pages, and they are there, and they are effective. That is, his potshots inject a welcome note of levity into a massive and complex scholarly analysis, and they should be no more off-putting to the reader who congratulates himself for being neutral than are the conventional pietisms of scholars who write from the standpoint of the Church.

Let none dismiss *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew* as partisan apologetics, as if those who do not believe in God must pursue a scorched-earth policy, erasing Jesus from the page of history as they have already erased his Father from the page of metaphysics. No, Zindler, in whose debt we already stand for his English translations of works by Arthur Drews, is setting forth specimens of the research and thinking that have led him to an admittedly radical position, not trying to adjust inconvenient facts into conformity with a position already held. Or at least that is how it reads to me.

A word about the point of the work as a piece of Zindler's larger project: I used to read (much more rudimentary) accounts of the lack of Jewish evidence for Jesus and dismiss them on the grounds that such arguments appeared to prove too much. If the silence of Philo, Justus of Tiberias and (probably) Josephus implied there was no Jesus for them to record or report, mustn't that imply there was no Christianity there, either? And that would, I supposed, be absurd. No one would doubt the presence of Palestinian Jewish Christians available to Josephus and the rest! *Or would they?* Zindler's point is precisely that such a Christianity in the Holy Land was indeed unknown because Christianity did not start there. It would have begun in Alexandria or Antioch (and other places as well, a phenomenon, like Mithraism, with several roots). It would have reached Palestine (and Judaized) later. Pardon my ignorance of a major component of the Christ-Myth theory. Now I get it.

Zindler has bitten off quite a bit to chew. He has determined to make it through something of a dark continent of obscure and turgid material, including the history of the debate over the *Testimonium*

Flavianum, the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, and the *Toledoth Jeschu* in its variations. It is necessarily slow going, but Zindler is a pleasant and capable guide through the

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jungle. Nor does he fail to engage the opinions of major scholars of each body of material.

The origin of *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew* is manifold. First, Zindler was preparing a new reprint edition of the Foote and Wheeler translation of one version of the *Toledoth Jeschu*, weeding out some errors that had crept into Madalyn Murray O'Hair's 1982 booklet edition. But other questions had been raised by the original publication, as when numerous Jews protested that such a vicious Christian-baiting gospel satire could never have been the (suicidal) work of Jews, any more than the fraudulent *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It must rather be a hoax blamed on Jews in order to incriminate them (in the same manner that one might well judge Spike Lee's film *Do the Right Thing* a propaganda reel for the Ku Klux Klan if one didn't know better). But this skepticism was ill-founded, and Zindler needed to set the record straight. Plus, conservative Christian apologists are now busy dusting off all manner of bad historical arguments amply refuted and forgotten long enough ago that they sound brand new, so Zindler figured he'd better enter the lists to set things straight as far as one book can. The result is an introduction that grew and grew till it dwarfed the original booklet it introduced.

In *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew*, Zindler carries the debate on both Josephus and (for good measure) Tacitus much farther along, making all apologetical appeals to these interpolations no longer credible even to the wishful thinkers. He combs through numerous Mishnahic and Talmudic texts which have often been set forth as implicit or coded references to Jesus, showing in virtually every case how the characters mentioned (*e.g.*, Elijah's disciple Gehazi or the post-biblical Ben Stada) have nothing to do with Jesus, and that only someone laboring under the assumption that the Rabbis *must* have had *something* to say about Jesus could ever have thought they did. In several cases, Zindler needs do no more than supply the immediate context of the disputed passages to show either that they are obvious interpolations or that they have been grossly misread outside of their natural setting. In this, Zindler renders the same

service performed for us by various second-generation biblical feminists (like Kathleen Corley) who have shown that supposed Rabbinical put-downs of

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women are nothing of the sort, convenient as the old readings might have been for feminist Christian apologetics.

One especially good example of traditional over-interpretation concerns the passage *j. Taanit* 65b: "R. Abahu said: 'If a man say to thee, "I am God," he is a liar; if [he says, "I am] the son of man," in the end people will laugh at him; if [he says:] "I will go up to heaven," he saith, but shall not perform it.'" Mustn't this be a reference to extravagant claims made by Jesus such as we find in the Gospel of John? It would certainly seem so—until a look at the context makes plain that it is rather a cumbersome play on Numbers 13:19: "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and he will not do it? Or has he spoken and will he not fulfill it?" (And see Isaiah 14:13, "I will ascend to heaven.") The point may simply have been equivalent to 1 John 1:8 ("If we say we have no sin, we are only deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.") plus Matthew 11:23 ("And as for you, Capernaum, do you imagine you will be exalted to heaven? Ha! You shall sink into Hades!"). The self-righteous one would usurp God's glory and will find himself shut out of heaven. What we would seem to have here, then, on the part of Christians searching for Jesus-references in Jewish sources, is another case of what early Christian scribes and sayings-transmitters did: taking a generic reference to human beings, 'the son of man,' and turning it into a Christological reference to Jesus.

I found minor points where I could pause to gag on a gnat. For instance, does Mark 12:32, where the people esteem John the Baptist as a prophet, really imply that John was understood to have lived long previous to Jesus? Just the opposite: it seems to suppose the issue of the status of a popular martyr is still a raw nerve, hence a recent matter. Similarly, does Mark 8:28 include John among the ranks of the *ancient* prophets? No, the point is rather that the crowd imagines the healer Mark knows as 'Jesus' to be the resurrected Baptizer. (On the other hand, Matthew 11:12//Luke 16:16 *does* seem to place John a generation or so before Jesus, just as Robert Eisler argued.)

Zindler opens the door on an intriguing mystery when he quotes Augustine as describing his beholding headless Ethiopians with eyes

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in their chests, as well as Abyssinian Cyclopes. Zindler has the text from Joseph Wheless, *Forgery in Christianity* and Robert Taylor's *Diegesis*. In the former, the citation is of "Sermon 37," while the latter credits "Sermon 33." Zindler admits he can find no such text in any printed edition of Augustine's works and infers it has been censored by ecclesiastical spin-doctors [p. 34], but I wonder if he is not rather unwittingly perpetuating a bit of libelous Freethought apocrypha. Are the unbelievers pulling the same trick with Augustine (to make him look like a blatant deceiver) that early believers played when they interpolated Josephus?

Zindler points to certain little known statements by various Church Fathers and scribes to the effect that Jesus died in the reign of Claudius [p. 128 *ff*.], as well as Jewish legends placing him a century earlier than the gospels do, in Alexander Jannaeus' era. Such data imply that the pinning down of the Jesus character to a particular historical niche was haphazard and did not stem from historical memory. A Jesus of unknown and contradictory date is likely to be a mythical Jesus badly historicized.

I find myself not quite convinced, with Zindler, that 'Jesus ben Pandera' is not even supposed to be Jesus. He's got me persuaded that Ben Stada is more likely Simon Magus, certainly not Jesus, and that Balaam is simply the Old Testament prophet, not a cipher for Jesus, but the Pandera business is so early a piece of anti-Christian lore that, when we find what sounds like the same thing in somewhat later Jewish writings, it is likely we are dealing with the same tradition. Even at that, the Jesus Pandera citations appear to be later interpolations reflecting Christian virgin birth claims.

Previous delvers into these matters took literally all the rabbinic attributions of Talmudic and Mishnaic sayings. Writing in the wake of Jacob Neusner's pioneering work, Zindler demonstrates what a genuinely Higher-Critical (source and redactional) treatment of the texts reveals. For instance, it turns out that Christian scholars had simply accepted very late statements of pre-critical rabbis that Ben Stada and Ben Pandera were the same, when now it seems plain that the old scholars were simply trying to force some economy on a

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mass of confusing traditions by harmonizing them. Likewise, Zindler shows how traditional stories about Ben Stada, *etc.*, were only later made to refer to Jesus. “Jesus the Nazorean” appears only in very late redactions of earlier texts which originally mentioned Jesus ben Pandera or other characters entirely.

The discussion of the *Toledoth Jeschu* (two versions of which appear as appendices) amply demonstrates that, as an integrated literary work, it does not go back very early but instead represents an oral tradition variously crystallized again and again in many written forms. Zindler shows that, while certain motifs of this gospel parody go back very early, the later text versions with their peculiarities stem from long after the entrance of Christianity into Palestine and do not represent any native Jewish historical memory of Jesus.

The Autobiography of Jesus[91]

Is it blasphemy for Norman Mailer to issue a book and call it a *gospel*? Or to turn down the heat a couple of degrees, is it at least inaccurate or unrealistic? Is it rather a make-believe gospel? I think not. A writing needn’t be ancient, or even very old, to count as a gospel. For what, after all, is a gospel but a Jesus book, a writer’s own evangel setting forth his or her vision of Jesus? I don’t think there’s a statute of limitations. There have, in my opinion, been at least three great twentieth-century gospels: *The Last Temptation of Christ* (both the original novel by Nikos Kazantzakis[92] and the Paul Schrader/Martin Scorsese film), Kahlil Gibran’s *Jesus the Son of Man*,[93] and Tim Rice’s libretto for *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Norman Mailer’s *The Gospel According to the Son*,[94] sad to say, suffers greatly by comparison.

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Source Criticism

Not surprisingly, Mailer used primarily Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as grist for his mill. Mailer and his Jesus know enough about modern New Testament scholarship to warn us that the four gospels are not the work of eyewitnesses and that they are not completely accurate.

Nonetheless *The Gospel According to the Son* is pretty much merely a slightly varnished mosaic of the four gospels. Mailer's first-person Jesus is like the evangelist Luke in that he objects to the shortcomings of previous gospels and yet feels free to make ample use of them! Here, in both cases, we can gauge what Harold Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence" which makes a newer author, whether Luke or Mailer, exaggerate the differences distinguishing him from his major influences. We like to be regarded as original, even when we are not, *especially* when we are not. At least Luke had the good taste not to bad-mouth his predecessors Mark and Q by name!

In a major blunder, Mailer does have his Jesus (the first-person narrator) refer to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John by name. In this way Mailer pricks the bubble of suspended disbelief. We are rudely brought back from our willingness to receive the narrative voice as that of Jesus, because Mailer rubs our noses in the manifest fact that the teller of the tale is a modern like ourselves, limited to the four gospels and chafing at the limitation. The effect is much like that in *A Course in Miracles*[95] or other New Age Bibles supposedly revealed in the words of the Ascended Christ yet with all the grace of an auto mechanics manual.

Mailer has done a bit of research beyond the borders of the canon, picking up bits and pieces from the *Gospel of Thomas* (sayings 25 and 28), the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* (its version of the Rich Young Ruler story in which Jesus rebukes the man's hypocrisy), and the marginal reading at Mark 3:1–6 in which the man with the withered hand tells Jesus he used to work as a stone mason.

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Further afield than this, we seem to have an echo of the infamous 'Satanic verses' episode in Islamic lore. According to one commentator on the Koran, the Prophet Muhammad was liable to being tricked into pronouncing spurious oracles inspired by Satan if he was not careful, though Allah would point them out afterward [Surah 22:52]. The same thing happens to Jesus on page 136. And if *The Last Temptation of Christ* felt free to borrow from Buddhist lore the image of Jesus sitting down and refusing to budge till God should reveal his will to him, so does Mailer seem to have taken a page from Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* to use in describing Jesus' baptism. "The heavens opened for an instant and it was

as if I saw a million, nay, a million million of souls" [p. 34]. Compare this with Siddhartha's final vision of his river running with the faces of all the people he has known in his long pilgrimage.

One must suspect as well that *The Gospel According to the Son* has been inspired by, and tips its turban to, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. We catch an echo of Kazantzakis when on a couple of occasions we are told Jesus hears the rustle of angel wings, when Lazarus emerges from the crypt still half-dead, when Jesus suddenly adds revolutionary rhetoric to his Galilean Summer of Love, and, of course, when Satan tempts him to come down from the cross to take up the life of an ordinary mortal. All of this is, one might say, too close for comfort, and it is difficult to see the point of these apparent borrowings since none of them has much of a function in Mailer's version.

Redaction Criticism

How has Norman Mailer adapted and refurbished his source materials to produce his own distinctive gospel? Despite the great distance in time between Mailer's gospel and the ancient gospels, there is much similarity in the way they were composed. A comparison of one ancient gospel with its source materials (earlier gospels) reveals some tendencies of gospel writing that stand out clearly in Norman Mailer's book as well. Ancient gospel writers liked to harmonize contradictions between their sources. They tended also to soften offensive statements in their sources. Similarly, they often glossed

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earlier gospels, rewriting stories or sayings so as to solve problems that used to puzzle readers of the earlier texts. Finally, they employed *midrash*, a technique of embellishing and elaborating stories by adding new color and detail implied in the original, shorter versions. Mailer's gospel uses all these time-honored techniques.

First, *harmonization*. The ancient evangelist of the *Gospel according to the Ebionites* had before him Mark's baptism scene in which the heavenly voice addresses Jesus, "You are my son," as well as Matthew's in which the voice says to the crowd, "*This is* my son." The Ebionite evangelist didn't want to leave out either version, so he has both: the voice first addresses Jesus, then the crowd. Matthew 10:34–36 has Jesus warn that he will bring "not peace but a sword." Luke's version of

the same Q saying changes it to “not peace but division” (Luke 12:51). Thomas harmonizes; he uses both: “I have come to throw divisions upon the earth, fire, sword, war” [16].

Most of the Jesus movies use the same techniques when they depict Jesus carrying his cross part of the way to Golgotha, then dropping it for Simon of Cyrene to pick up on the rebound. Which gospel does this sequence come from? None. It is a harmonization of John, where Jesus carries his own cross the whole way, and the Synoptics, where Simon does the job for him. Mailer, too, harmonizes. For instance, he draws bits and pieces from the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, cutting out what doesn’t fit and soldering together what does. And throughout, a bit of John here, some Synoptics there. The result is not exactly a seamless garment.

Second, *softening the rough spots*. Matthew smoothed out Mark at several points. Mark 10:17–18 had the Rich Young Ruler address Jesus, “Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answers, “Why do you call me good? Only God is good.” This gave Matthew a theological headache: how could Jesus deny his goodness, much less draw such a line between himself and God? So Matthew 19:16–17 has the inquirer ask, “Master, what *good thing* shall I do to inherit eternal life?” This time Jesus answers, “Why do you *ask me about the good*? Only God is good.” Similarly, Matthew has John the Baptist and Jesus assure the reader that, despite appearances,

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Jesus was not really coming to be baptized for the remission of his sins [3:14–15]. He has Jesus merely refuse to cure his unbelieving countrymen [Matt. 13:58] instead of having him *unable* to do it [Mark 6:5]. John felt it unseemly for Jesus to try to weasel out of the crucifixion and not to carry his own cross, so he changed both [John 12:27–28; 19:17].

In the same way, Mailer feels compelled to make the best of the Slaughter of the Innocents which he has taken over from Matthew 2:16–18. Matthew doesn’t seem to care about Herod’s butchery as long as the infant Jesus is saved. Mailer, on the other hand, has Jesus speculate whether it may not be the spirits of all those infant martyrs that enable him to work his wonders. He makes the best of it! Mailer, like many readers, is affronted by Jesus’ rude words to his mother in Mark 3:33–35, so he has Jesus immediately regret saying them and brood on them

repeatedly through the rest of the book. Again, it might seem a little cold-blooded for Jesus to have stayed put for four days, just to allow Lazarus enough time to be good and dead [John 11:1–15], so Mailer has Jesus himself get sick and be unable to rush to Lazarus' bedside till it's too late.

Third, *explaining puzzling points in earlier gospels*. Matthew not infrequently glossed Mark. Why would Judas have volunteered to hand Jesus over to the authorities? Mark didn't say, and inquiring minds wanted to know. So Matthew hazarded the guess that Judas needed a few extra bucks. In Matthew 26:14–15, it is Judas who first mentions money, not the Sanhedrin as in Mark 14:10–11. How much money did Judas receive? Mark hadn't said, so Matthew [26:15] found the figure of thirty silver shekels in Zechariah 11:12.Why would Pontius Pilate, a notorious anti-Semite, have had the slightest scruple about putting Jesus to death? Mark didn't explain it to Matthew's satisfaction. So the latter had Mrs. Pilate pass her husband an urgent warning not to jinx himself by condemning Jesus [Matt. 27:19].

In like manner, Mailer himself wondered why on earth Jesus wouldn't allow the cured Gadarene demoniac to leave the Decapolis, where he was a hated pariah, and follow Jesus as a disciple. So in *The*

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Gospel According to the Son Jesus explains to us that he already had a full complement of twelve, and that he couldn't risk having a Gentile on board.

Fourth, *midrash*. Mailer expands the stories by connecting the dots between them, drawing inferences where the ancient writers left only intriguing possibilities. In this fashion the authors of several ancient Jewish writings drew a midrashic inference from the fact that the Flood story is placed side by side with that of the sons of God marrying mortal women in Genesis 6:1–4. They concluded that the divine-human interbreeding was blasphemous; it injected into humanity the wickedness which eventually provoked God's liquid justice. Thus *1 Enoch*, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and the *Book of Jubilees* all retold the story making the evil of the sons of God explicit.

Mailer makes much of the fact that Judas' visit to the Sanhedrin in Mark immediately follows the Bethany anointing. He infers that it was Jesus' words about the poor on that occasion that caused Judas to lose all faith in him. Mailer discerns that Mark must have sandwiched the story of

the woman with the issue of blood [Mark 5:25] between the halves of the story of Jairus' daughter [Mark 5:22–24, 35–43] for some good reason. On any reading, it serves to heighten the dramatic tension: imagine poor Jairus sweating and glancing at his watch as the old lady goes on at great length about her many operations and Medicare forms. "Let's get this show on the road!" But Mailer heightens the tension further: noting that Mark had Jesus sense that "power had gone out of him," Mailer reasons that Jesus feared the old lady had depleted his power to such an extent that he might not be up to the challenge of raising Jairus' daughter. So grows the legend!

Albert Schweitzer[96] first noticed how the disciples' jockeying over who will be greatest in the kingdom always follows Jesus' Passion predictions. What was the connection? Schweitzer's explanation, an ingenious one, was that Jesus had taught them that his kingdom
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should soon be inaugurated by his martyrdom: he suffers, enters into his glory, and they get a piece of the action. Equally ingenious is Mailer's suggestion that the disciples were taking Jesus at his word that he would soon be dead and gone, and that they were squabbling over who would take his place! So that's the way it reads in Mailer's gospel.

Mailer's Messiah

What kind of Jesus emerges from *The Gospel According to the Son*? Given all the badmouthing of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we might expect to have a critical, historical portrait, or an attempt at it. But if that's what we expect, then the Son of Man has come at a time we expected him not. We get more or less the traditional Christian Jesus. It is not that Mailer makes no attempt at all to free Jesus from confinement in his stained-glass prison. But this does not amount to much, and it's stale to boot. Mailer has Jesus hale from a pious family of Essene carpenters, a favorite feature of the Rationalist lives of Jesus ridiculed by Albert Schweitzer (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*) and used to better advantage in Upton Sinclair's little-known historical Jesus novel *The Secret Life of Jesus*.[97] The connection is by no means implausible; Robert Eisler (*The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*) and Hugh J. Schonfield (*The Passover Plot*) both showed how much sense the Essene

carpenter link would make of certain gospel data. But Mailer drops the whole business almost as soon as he mentions it.

He flirts, too, with old-time Rationalism in explaining the miracles. Mailer's version of the feeding of the five thousand is both naturalistic and eucharistic, in accord with many modern scholars who see the whole story as stemming from ancient eucharistic liturgy.[98] Mailer's Jesus does not miraculously increase the supply of food; he merely distributes tiny crumbs of fish and bread in a gesture of spiritual feeding, placing each crumb carefully onto each extended tongue, like a priest at the alter rail.

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Again, Mailer, having apparently set out upon a historicizing, if rationalizing, path, abruptly turns around, having his hero perform the most fantastic of the gospel miracles, including the Dionysian alchemy of water into wine and the walking on the sea. Mailer even ups the ante on one of the most spectacular tales. In his version, the man born blind [John chapter 9] is so darn blind that he has only empty eye-sockets! The ancient healing god Asclepius is said to have performed this side-show prodigy, and so are modern radio preachers like R.W. Shambach. But Jesus?

Last but not least, Mailer's Jesus dies and rises from the dead. And just as *Jesus Christ Superstar* ends with Judas' voice echoing from the twentieth century, *The Gospel According to the Son* ends with Jesus narrating from heaven, musing over the ironies of Christianity and Christendom in their long and tragic history. If Gore Vidal's account of Christian origins was called *Live from Golgotha*,[99] Mailer's might as well be dubbed "Live from the Right Hand of the Father" [p. 240]. It invites us to picture the ludicrous eventuality of Jesus as Mel Brooks's character the Two-Thousand Year-Old Man, reminiscing about the good old days.

The Peril of Modernizing Jesus[100]

Mailer's Jesus is not 'thoroughly modern,' like the 70's Jesus of *Godspell*. But *The Gospel According to the Son* does reflect its *Sitz-im-Leben* of twentieth-century America. Jesus attracts lipsticked homosexuals in Galilee, where pagan Gentile mores hold sway. And yet Jesus condemns masturbation as a damning sin [p. 175]!

Jesus becomes a Youth Services worker in the case of Jairus' daughter, whose ill-health, he immediately surmises, was due to living among a dysfunctional family. She must have been 'acting out' by kicking the bucket—*that*'ll show 'em!

Jesus is assimilated to pop-culture messiah Leo Buscaglia when Mailer has him reflect, "I stared at all in the room as if I had need of

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every man and woman there" [p. 90]. Here is the encounter-group Jesus of liberal seminarians.

But if Mailer's Jesus has not been grossly modernized, these few examples notwithstanding, he is inauthentically modern in a more subtle sense. More telling than that, Mailer's Jesus is a stranger to the sense of the gospel sayings attributed to him. He can make no more sense of them than the modern reader who quotes them with reverent befuddlement.

Mailer and Kähler

The greatest relevance of Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son* for biblical studies is as a test of the controversial claim of theologian Martin Kähler (*The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*) that historical scholarship could never 'psych out' the Jesus of the gospels and the Christian tradition. The historian could never account for the gospel portrait of Christ by appeal to psychological, biographical factors, as in the case of other noted historical figures. The reason for this is that the 'historic biblical Christ' is greater than mere humanity, the Son of God in truth. While not inviting such comparisons, Kähler might have said with equal justice that no psychological accounting for Hercules or Oedipus is possible. These are epic figures, larger than life for all that their sagas ring with authenticity in the depths of the human spirit, and so with Jesus. This is one reason many theologians draw an impenetrable line between the 'historical Jesus' that scholarly imagination might reconstruct on the one hand, and the 'Christ of faith,' the savior preached by the Church on the other.

By contrast, Liberal Protestant theology has always been happy enough to dispense with the divine Jesus of the gospels in favor of an understandable Jesus made over in our dwarfish image. Liberal theologians and preachers thought they could distill the personality of the

historical Jesus from the gospels and hold it up as a kind of role model for modern Christians.[101] They agreed with Kähler that

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the Jesus Christ of dogma and gospel could not be understood 'from below'[102] on analogy with our own personality or psychology. So they jettisoned that Jesus.

Where does Norman Mailer fit into this discussion? His Jesus walks on water, raises the dead, is conscious of being God's son, even reports to us from the throne of God in heaven! Mailer is depicting the gospel Jesus, the supernatural Jesus. But he is at the same time attempting to draw a plausible psychological portrait of Jesus. Indeed, that would seem to be the whole point of his book. If he were able to bring this off, he would have met Martin Kähler's challenge. He would have shown that the 'true God and true man' Jesus is historically plausible, not necessarily a figment of the mythopoeic imagination. Historical Jesus scholarship might owe traditional dogma a second look. Has Mailer met the challenge? I think not.[103]

I have already observed that Mailer's Jesus seems not to know what to make of his own sayings. Mailer fails to have his Jesus provide insightful commentary on the sayings, or even to provide an inner monologue from which the gospel sayings might naturally emerge. He consistently portrays Jesus as passively witnessing his own deeds and words as if another were the source of them. He is as surprised to find himself walking on the water as Sister Bertrille is when the wind first wafts her into the air on *The Flying Nun*. He is as surprised that his touch heals anyone as charlatan Marjoe Gortner was when he somehow managed to heal a blind boy on stage.[104] "These words might as well have come from the sky. They seemed far away from me even as I said them" [p. 212]. This plaint of the

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dumbfounded Jesus might serve as the epigram for the whole book. He seems to be merely quoting the gospels throughout, which is of course exactly what he is really doing. It reminds one of the vastly overrated film *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* by Pierre Paolo Pasolini, which looks like it was shot in the director's back yard, with a man draped in a bedsheet yelling gospel texts at a still camera.

There are novels in which the one who tells the story to the reader is not the character from whose standpoint the reader perceives the action. The narrator may be telling someone else's story as that character saw it. The narrator may be an omniscient narrator who can tell the reader just what the protagonist is thinking and seeing. Or the narrator may simply follow the action, so to speak, tagging along with the protagonist, describing what happens to him, but still having to guess what the protagonist may be thinking, just like the reader. This approach allows the story to retain a greater amount of suspense, since many secrets can be withheld from the reader until the protagonist sees fit to speak his mind. Here is a strange piece of narrative strategy: Jesus is the protagonist as well as the narrator of *The Gospel According to the Son*, and yet he appears no closer to his own thoughts and motives than an external observer. The closest we come to the inner life of Jesus is sharing his banal, after-the-fact reactions. Jesus was surprised that he did this, that Peter said that, whatever. This or that bothered him. We feel we are hearing one of those stupid TV interviews in which the host asks the movie star, "What was it like working with Betty Davis?" "It was great. I liked it." Big deal.

The effect is eerily similar to that in the strangest religious movie ever made, *Mohammed Messenger of God* (1977). For fear of ruffling Islamic feathers (something not too hard to do), the producers decided to refrain from showing the Prophet or letting his voice be heard. Other characters had one-sided conversations with the invisible Prophet. The camera eye took his place. While the viewer in this way shares the protagonist's perspective, the result is completely hollow since there is no subjectivity of the character for the viewer to enter into. The same is true of Mailer's *The Gospel According to the*
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Son. His Jesus is simply a camera eye, his commentary as superfluous as the vacuous chatter of the TV commentators on a football game.

Historian or Nestorian

Surely Mailer is capable of better! What happened? In this case, I think we can lay the blame on the tools rather than the workman. The book stays pretty close to the wording of the gospel passages it assimilates, and the result is a quasi-biblical style throughout. In a radio interview Mailer

said he had worked his way through part of an early draft in which he sought consistently to mimic the terse yet artful prose of the Bible, but he found the style not quite suitable to his purpose. And thus the style of the published version is not straight Bible pastiche. But Mailer has sought to have his cake and eat it, too. In the end he did not stray far enough from his prototype. His stylistic compromise is unsuccessful, and so is the novel as a whole, because along with the biblical prose he has retained its limitations. The Bible very seldom lets us read the minds of its characters except by inference from their actions.[105] Seldom do they speak their minds, spill their guts. And this mode of story-telling set the evolution of biblical prose on a certain trajectory, one with very limited resources for character introspection. This is why it took as long as Saint Augustine's *Confessions* for true autobiography to emerge in Christian literature.

So Mailer has failed to depict the inner life of the Christ of faith. Nor has he tried to portray that of the historical Jesus. He did make a preliminary survey of contemporary historical Jesus scholarship, including some of the work of the Jesus Seminar, but early on he decided it was a quicksand pit: who could really be sure where in the haystack of sayings and stories the needle of the historical Jesus lay? Here Mailer might have been of some help to us. Couldn't a novelist with his eye for characters have chipped away at the marble of the gospels and yielded a plausible and striking portrait, even if it was just a guess, of the historical Jesus?

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What has he done? Mailer has succeeded, inadvertently, in depicting the Christ of Nestorian Christian faith. This fourth-century 'heresy' posited a Christology according to which the divine Word had become incarnate in the man Jesus of Nazareth without the two joining in a single identity. The unity of the two subjectivities, Jesus and the Word, was a harmony of will and purpose, not a 'hypostatic union of natures' as in the rival Christology which became orthodox dogma. The favorite text of the Nestorian would be: "He has not left me alone, for I always do that which pleases him" [John 8:29]. The Nestorian idea was confusing: Jesus remains distinct from the Word, so are we supposed to imagine Jesus as some sort of channeler for the Word? If so, what makes him any different from, say, the prophet Isaiah?

But this is the Jesus of Norman Mailer's gospel: the Son, the Word, is rattling around in there somewhere, but the narrator Jesus seems as clueless as we are. The things he says and does, presumably at divine instigation, are as much a mystery to him as they are to us.

[1] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 3/1, Spring 1996.

[2] Arlo J. Nau, *Peter in Matthew: Discipleship, Diplomacy, and Dispraise, with an Assessment of Power and Privilege in the Petrine Office* [Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN., 1992].
[3] Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971].
[4] Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* [NY: Paulist Press, 1978].
[5] Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989: 52, 54, 60, 63, 83, *etc.*].
[6] Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction to Poetics*. Trans. Richard Howard. Theory and History of Literature, Volume 1 [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981: 23–24].
[7] William Wrede, "The Task and Methods of 'New Testament Theology.'" Trans. Robert Morgan. In Robert Morgan (ed.), *The Nature of New Testament Theology: The Contribution of William Wrede and Adolf Schlatter*. Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, 25 [Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1973: 68–116].
[8] Robert M. Price, *The Widow Traditions in Luke–Acts: A Feminist-Critical Scrutiny*. SBL Dissertation Series 155 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997].
[9] Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel*. Trans. James Boyce, Donald Juel, William Poehlmann, with Roy Harrisville [NY: Abingdon Press, 1969].
[10] Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963].
[11] Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke*.
[12] Philip R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel.'* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 148 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992: 104]: "The *readers* of this literature, like the writers, must also be *professionally literate*…. It is written largely for self-consumption." Written, that is, by scribes for themselves and their colleagues. I should think the same applies to the gospels. Who else could have even had access to them?
[13] Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991] is the shining example of this approach.
[14] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 6/1, Spring 1999.
[15] John C. Meagher, *Clumsy Construction in Mark's Gospel: A Critique of Form and Redaktionsgeschichte*. Toronto Studies in Theology [Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979].
[16] Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, pp. 19–21.
[17] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 7/2, Fall 2000.
[18] Walter Schmithals, "The Parabolic Teachings in the Synoptic Tradition." Trans. Darrell J. Doughty. *Journal of Higher Criticism* [4/2, Fall 1997: 8–11].
[19] Earl Richard, *Acts 6:1–8:4: The Author's Method of Composition*. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 41 [Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978].
[20] Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000].
[21] Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983].
[22] Dennis R. MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer: The Odyssey, Plato, and the Acts of Andrew* [Oxford University Press, 1994]; see also MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003]. Also, my own MacDonald-inspired piece, "Rhoda and Penelope: Two More Cases of Luke's Suppression of Women." In Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff, (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles*. Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings 9 [NY: T&T Clark, 2004: 98–104].
[23] On Mark's possible use of Q, see Harry Fleddermann, *Mark and Q: A Study of the Overlap Texts*. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium CXXII [Leuven: Leuven University Press/Uitgeverij Peeters, 1995].
[24] On the other hand, Marcion's gospel lacked the Temptation, and this opens the question whether canonical Luke has derived the episode from Matthew, even if there was a Q source employed independently by Matthew and the Ur-Lukas, which, however, had no Temptation. Matthew, then, would simply have expanded Mark's version.
[25] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 11/2, Fall 2005.
[26] Stephen C. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of* Secret Mark [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005].
[27] Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973].
[28] Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* [NY: Harper & Row, 1973].
[29]*Hapax legomena* are words not often used by a writer, not among his favorites, but inevitably used when the need arises.
[30] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 11/2, Fall 2005.
[31] Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery*. Studies in Christianity and Judaism 15 [Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005].
[32] That strategy didn't work for me when I tried to pry a copy of Noble Drew Ali's *Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple* out of one of the local elders. But years later I did manage to find a pirate reprint edition on a book table run by the Ansaru Allah Community on a Greenwich Village sidewalk.
[33] S.T. Joshi, *The Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos* [Poplar Bluff, MO: 2008: 34–35].
[34] Sandmel, Samuel, "Parallelomania" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 [1962: 1–13].
[35] At least Brown understands what "parallelomania" is, unlike conservative apologists, who pretend it is an excuse to dismiss all arguments based on striking biblical/extra-biblical parallels.

[36] Scott G. Brown, "The Question of Motive in the Case against Morton Smith" *Journal of Biblical Literature* [125/2, Summer 2006: 353, 354].
[37] J.H. Hunter, *The Mystery of Mar Saba* [NY: Evangelical Publishers, 1940].
[38] Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* [NY: Oxford University Press, 2002: 101–102].
[39] Robert M. Price, "Second Thoughts on the Secret Gospel" *Bulletin of Biblical Research* [14/1, Spring 2004: 127–132].
[40] Heck, I wrote a whole book about the genre: *Secret Scrolls: Revelations from the Lost Gospel Novels* [Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011].
[41] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 12/2, Fall 2006.
[42] Peter Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled: Imagined Rituals of Sex, Death, and Madness in a Biblical Forgery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
[43] Joe Nickell, *Inquest on the Shroud of Turin: Latest Scientific Findings* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998).
[44] See Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*. Based on the Israel Goldstein Lectures, Delivered at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York [NY: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965].
[45] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 1, Fall 1994.
[46] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Luke: A Critical Study*. Translation, with an Introduction by Connop Thirlwall. With Further Essays, Emendations and Other Apparatus by Terrence N. Tice. Schleiermacher: Studies and Translations, Volume 13. [Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press 1993].
[47] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*. Trans. S. Maclean Gilmour. Lives of Jesus Series [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975].
[48] William Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society*. Trans. H.P. Rickman. The Academy Library [NY: Harper & Row Torchbooks, 1962].
[49] R.T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus* [Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006].
[50] I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*. I Believe Series [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977].
[51] Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism*.
[52] Harald Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition*. Trans. E. Margaret Rowley and Robert A. Kraft [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970].
[53] Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*. Trans. Eric J. Sharpe. Acts Seminarri Neotestamentici Upsaliensis XXII [Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup / Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1961].
[54] Dennis E. Nineham, "Eye-witness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition – I." In Nineham, *Explorations in Theology 1* [London: SCM Press, 1977: 24].
[55] Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983].
[56] C.F. Evans, "The Central Section of St. Luke's Gospel." In D.E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R.H. Lightfoot* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967: 37–53].
[57] Vernon K. Robbins, "By Land and by Sea: The We-Passages and Ancient Sea Voyages." In Charles H. Talbert (ed.), *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*. Perspectives in Religious Studies Special Studies Series No. 5 [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978: 214–242].
[58] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980].
[59] See my discussion of Paulus and the whole Protestant Rationalist approach in *Night of the Living Savior: Neglected Aspects of the Resurrection Debate* [Cranford: American Atheist Press, 2011].
[60] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 12/2, Fall 2006.
[61] Robert Kysar, *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel*. [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005].
[62] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980].
[63] Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* [2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1983].
[64] Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980]; Gerard, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988].
[65] Serymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1978]; Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990]. See also Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative*. Janua Linguarum. Studia Memoriae Nicolai van Wijk Dedicata. Series Maior 108 [NY: Mouton Publishers, 1982]; F.K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*. Trans. Charlotte Goedsche [NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986].
[66] Besides, how can someone long familiar with a text, even with a good imagination, be sure he is approximating what a fresh reader would get from it? What these Reader-Response critics are giving us is the opposite of what they think they offer: it is the reading of one who has in fact read the text scores or hundreds of times! It would be interesting to find an experimental subject who actually had never read John (or whatever), sit him down to read it, and then interrogate him: "What did you make of this? And this?" The results would be interesting, albeit most likely horrifying. In fact, do we not conduct such experiments every time we assign a paper to a freshman Bible student? It has to make one question the whole approach.
[67] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*. Studies in Biblical Theology. New Series 17 [Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1970: 26–32]; Martin Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma*. Trans. S.G.F. Brandon [Boston: Beacon Press, 1965: 120–161]; Jean Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*. The Deveopment of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, Volume One. Trans. John A. Baker, Chapter Four, "The Trinity and Angelology,"

[Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964: 117–146]; Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*. Trans. J.S. Bowden [NY: Sheed and Ward, 1965: 52–61].
[68] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary.* Trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975].
[69] C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* [NY: Cambridge University Press, 1963]; *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* [NY: Cambridge University Press, 1953].
[70] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: Introduction, Translation and Notes*. Vol. 1. Anchor Bible 29 [Garden City: Doubleday, 1966]; Vol. 2. Anchor Bible 29A [Garden City: Doubleday, 1970].
[71] Robert T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 11 [NY: Cambridge University Press, 1970].
[72] Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*. Supplements to Novum Testamentum Volume XIV [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967].
[73] J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* [NY: Harper & Row, 1968].
[74] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 5/1, Spring 1998.
[75] Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). It looks to me like Elaine Pagels lifted pretty much her whole argument in her book *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* [NY: Vintage Books, 2004] from Riley's, which she barely mentions.
[76] Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987].
[77] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 10/1, Spring 2003.
[78] Yuri Kuchinsky, *The Magdalene Gospel: A Look Behind the New Testament* [Toronto: Roots Publishing, 2002].
[79] Robert M. Price, "Eisenman's Gospel of James the Just," in Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner (eds.), *The Brother of Jesus: James the Just and His Mission* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001: 196–197].
[80] It may well be that originally these figures were not intended as blood brothers of an earthly, historical Jesus, but by the time of the gospels, this is how Christians were understanding, or redefining, the term 'brethren of the Lord.'
[81] Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat.* Trans. Yvonne Freccero [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989: 18, 59].
[82] Originally published in *Journal of Higher Criticism*, 7/2, Fall 2000.
[83] Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence*. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000].
[84] Bernhard Pick, *The Life of Jesus from Extra-Canonical Sources* [NY: John B. Alden, 1887).
[85] Bernhard Pick, *Jesus in the Talmud: His Personality, his Disciples and his Sayings* [Chicago: Open Court, 1913].

[86] Joachim Jeremias, *Unknown Sayings of Jesus*. Trans. Reginald H. Fuller [NY: Macmillan, 1957; 2nd ed. London: SPCK, 1964].
[87] Roderic Dunkerley, *Beyond the Gospels* [Baltimore: Penguin/Pelican Books, 1957].
[88] F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974].
[89] Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature & the New Testament: What We Cannot Show, We Do not Know* [Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994].
[90] Frank R. Zindler, *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew* [Cranford: American Atheist Press, 2004].
[91] Originally published in *The Fourth R*, vol. 10, #3/4, May–August 1997.
[92] Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation of Christ.* Trans. P.A. Bien [NY: Bantam Books, 1961].
[93] Kahlil Gibran, *Jesus the Son of Man: His Words and his Deeds as Told and Recorded by Those who Knew him* [NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976].
[94] Norman Mailer, *The Gospel According to the Son: A Novel* [NY: Random House, 1997].
[95] Helen Schucman, *A Course in Miracles*. Combined Edition [Glen Ellen: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1992]. See my analysis of this dreadful book in my *Top Secret: The Truth behind Today's Pop Mysticisms*, Chapter 5, "A Course in Malarky,"[Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2008: 131–154].

[96] Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion*. Trans. Walter Lowrie [NY: Schocken Books, 1964: 77–80].
[97] Sinclair Lewis, *The Secret Life of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Mercury Books, 1962].
[98] Raymond E. Brown, "The Johannine Sacramentary." In Brown, *New Testament Essays* [Garden City: Doubleday Image Books, 1968: 105].
[99] Gore Vidal, *Live from Golgotha: The Gospel according to Gore Vidal* [NY: Penguin Books, 1993].
[100] Henry J. Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus* [NY: Macmillan, 1937].
[101] Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Personality of Jesus: The Soul of Christianity*. A Sermon Preached at Temple Beth-el, New York, April 13, 1930.
[102] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*. Trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977: 33].
[103] I'm not saying it's impossible, for I think Kazantzakis, Schrader, and Scorcese have done it. Indeed, how ironic that religious conservatives maligned and despised *The Last Temptation of Christ*, seeing that it is the most *orthodox* Jesus film ever made! It plausibly depicts a 'true man' agonizing over the encroaching realization that he is also somehow 'true God.' This is why this Jesus is depicted as both 'lunatic and Lord.' He would *have* to be if he is eventually to be able to say to the High Prirst, "When I'm saying 'I,' I'm saying 'God.'"
[104] Marjoe Gortner, *Marjoe* [NY: Harper & Row, 1973].

[105] Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History*. Trans. W.H. Carruth [NY: Schocken Books, 1964: 58–63].

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Conclusion:

The Centrality of the Margin

In his essay "The Parergon,"[1] Jacques Derrida speaks of the paradox of the margin, like the frame of a painting, which seems peripheral in importance, yet, by marking the lineaments of the work, it *defines* it. Thus what is at the margins is at the same time central in revealing the meaning of that which it encloses. In biblical studies, too, it may be that, even if only by virtue of contrast, that which is dismissed as marginal (*e.g.*, eccentric theories) helps us better to grasp what is going on in the whole endeavor. I certainly think so, as the marginal theories (even when I reject them) sometimes indicate what are and are not the true extremes. What has been regarded as radical and extreme may start to look timid and conservative once one sees how far the questions can actually be pursued. Perhaps the boundaries of the canon (or of what Foucault called "the archive," the accepted conceptions and conventions of scholarship in any given period) have been too narrowly drawn for reasons not at first clear, since those who drew them hid their agendas very well. Perhaps attention to the margins will reveal hitherto-unsuspected reductions to absurdity, retroactively vitiating positions we have considered the impregnable 'sure results of criticism.'

I have explored several extreme-seeming theories in this book, and I have found them all to be both tantalizing and illuminating. I have learned that the issue is not whether one accepts or rejects a whole book, but whether it throws new kindling on the fire as I pursue the questions in my own way, and to my own eventual conclusions. I have come to believe that we can never be sure we are in possession of the one true reading of the evidence, or of a single book. We pursue the truth in interpretation as sailors navigate by the fixity of the North Star. They do not imagine they will one day *reach*

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that stellar object. No, they are merely using it as a reference point. We can hope only to become progressively less confused. None of us will live

long enough to hope for more than that. Not even Jesus did.

[1] Jacques Derrida, “The Parergon,” Trans. Craig Owens. *October* [Summer, 1979: 3–41].